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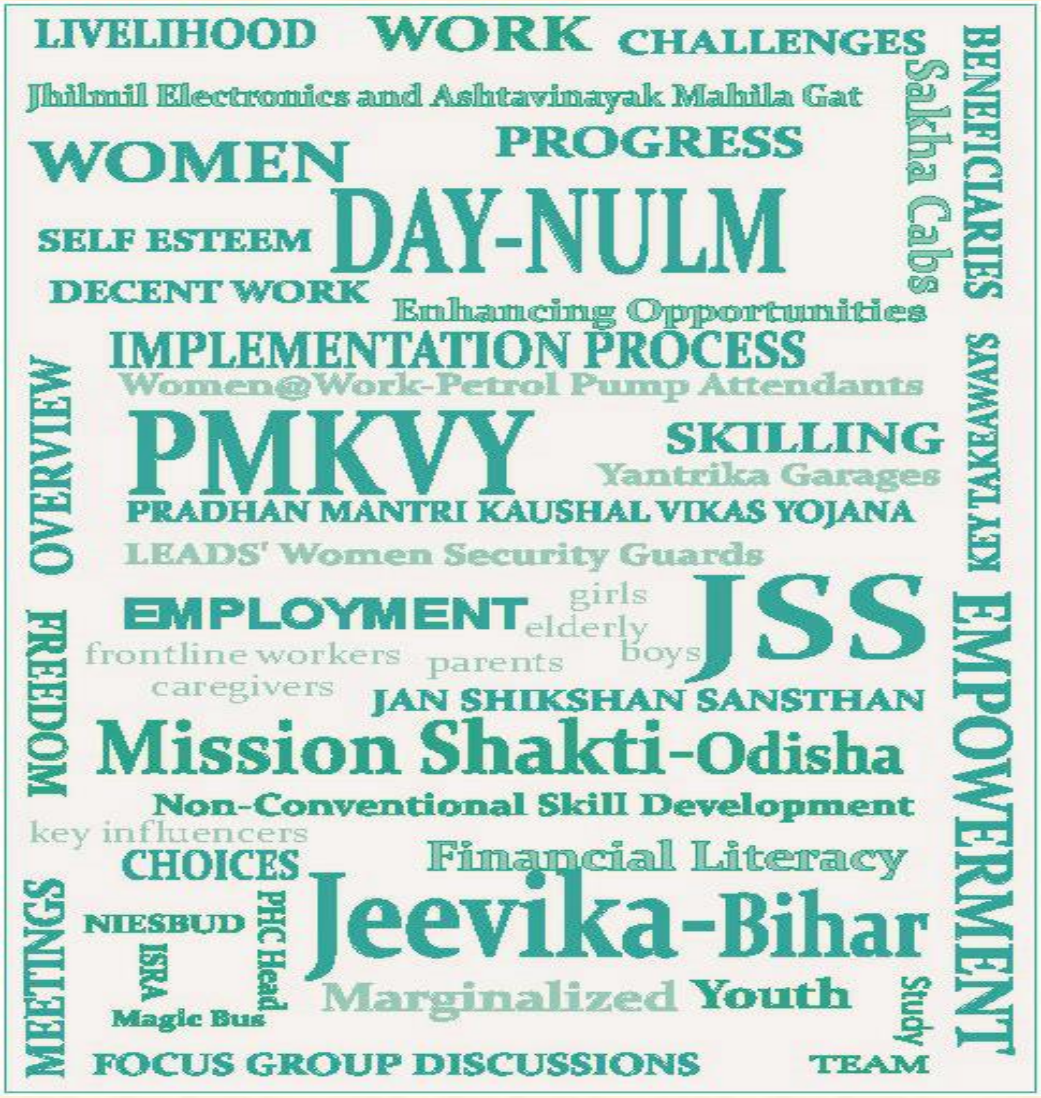

Challenging Gender Norms: Enhancing Opportunities for Marginalised Youth through Financial Literacy and Non-Conventional Skill Development

Scoping Study conducted by Vedi and Harsh
Centre for Advocacy and Research

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Preface

This need assessment study has been conducted as part of the project Challenging Gender Norms: Enhancing Opportunities for Marginalised Youth through Financial Literacy and Non-Conventional Skill Development implemented by the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR).

The study focuses on adolescent girls and boys, and women, living in the unauthorised resettlement colonies of Khoda, Ghaziabad, and Delhi NCR. Its objective is to understand the existing social and gender norms, and the barriers adolescents—especially girls—face in mobility, and in accessing new skills. It also seeks their insights on aspirational livelihood possibilities and the scope to engage in non-traditional livelihoods. The study presents policy enablement by the central government and state governments for the economic empowerment of girls, women, diverse genders, and their intersectionalities, highlighting the best practices in financial literacy and non-traditional livelihoods pursued by girls and women across different sectors.

In line with the project mandate and design of engaging young people, the needs assessment was carried out by Vedi Jain and Harshwardhan Mishra, undergraduate students from Deshbandhu College, University of Delhi. Vedi and Harsh planned the assessment, and conducted the focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and finally, the desk literature review.

Focus Group Discussions

- Adolescent Girls (Pre Test): Sandhya Devi, Khushbu, Pramila Devi, Neha Kumari, Vandana, Rakhi Kumari, Radha, Palak Pal, Priti, Nisha, Fulnaz
- Adolescent Girls (FGD): Chaya, Ruby, Rani, Priti, Anushka, Mahi, Manju, Anju, Shalu, Kajal, Muskan, Anjali, Riya
- Adolescent Boys: Rohit Kumar, Inderjeet, Rohan, Rupesh, Gopal, Vinit, Sarvan, Kunal, Shaurya Kumar
- Parents and Caregivers: Kailash Singh, Banke Lal, Saroj Devi, Neeru, Priyanka, Sanjana, Minakshi, Usha, Satpal, Nanhi, Rayamurti, Gabbar Singh, Chitra Lekha, Mohar Shri
- Frontline Workers: Usha, Sarvesh, Sheela Jha, Seema Mishra, Anganwadi Workers, Rashmi Sharma, Chand Mohammad, Akanksha, Savidha Dubey, Sangeeta Rai, Sudha, Rinku, Asha, ANM and Dispensary teams
- Elderly and Key Influencers: Nawab Singh, Asharfi Devi, Sudha Devi, Anaro, Anju Devi, Parwati Devi, Vijay Pal, Sarvesh, Gaganti Devi, Usha Devi, Sunil Kumar, Urmila Devi, Ishrawati, Bhure Lal

- CFAR Team: Rupa, Shashi Kaur, Nirmala Raturi, Raghubeer Singh Negi, Deepak Chand Sharma and Kundan Chauhan

Key Informant Interviews

- Abhishek Agrawal, Co-founder, Institute of Social Responsibility and Accountability (ISRA)
- Dr. Alka Bhardwaj, Centre-in-Charge, Public Health Centre, Khoda
- D.K. Singh, Chief Consultant, The National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD)
- Divya Aggarwal, Training Coordinator, The National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD)
- Jyoti, Mahila Pragati Manch – South East, and an E-Rickshaw Driver
- Mukesh Yadav, District Livelihood Manager, Magic Bus India Foundation
- Nandan Mishra, Manager Livelihood Programme, Institute of Social Responsibility and Accountability (ISRA)
- Rajender Singh, Director, Jan Shikshan Sansthan
- Vidya, Mahila Pragati Manch – South East, and an E-Rickshaw Driver

Key Recommendations and Takeaways

The Scoping Study presents innovative approaches to empowering women through non-traditional livelihoods, challenging gender stereotypes, and fostering economic independence. Here are some key recommendations and takeaways:

Promote Awareness and Education: The study highlights the importance of raising awareness and providing education, especially among marginalised communities, to overcome barriers to participation. Initiatives should include awareness campaigns, community outreach programmes, and partnerships with educational institutions to promote gender equality and encourage women to pursue non-traditional careers.

Address Societal Norms and Cultural Resistance: To overcome deep-rooted gender norms and cultural beliefs, initiatives should engage with communities, religious leaders, and influencers to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality. Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity should be prioritised to ensure interventions are accepted and embraced by the community.

Ensure Safety and Security: Safety and security concerns, particularly for women working in non-traditional fields or high-crime areas, must be addressed through comprehensive training, access to support services, and partnerships with local law enforcement agencies. Providing safe working environments is essential to attract and retain women in these professions.

Provide Comprehensive Training: All the models emphasise the importance of comprehensive training that goes beyond technical skills to include personal development, empowerment, and entrepreneurship skills. Training programmes should be tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by women from marginalised communities, empowering them to succeed in their chosen profession.

Empowerment through Ownership: Empowering women to take ownership of their livelihoods and businesses is crucial for long-term sustainability and economic independence. Initiatives should provide opportunities for women to be actively involved in all aspects of their businesses, from production to marketing and management.

Encourage Replication and Scaling: Successful models like Azad Foundation's Sakha Cabs and Jhilmil Electronics should be replicated and scaled up in other communities and regions to maximise impact. Sharing best practices, and lessons learned, and providing support to new initiatives can help replicate success and empower more women.

Advocate for Policy Change: Advocacy efforts should focus on endorsing policy changes that support women's empowerment and gender equality in the workforce. This includes policies to

promote equal pay, eliminate gender discrimination, and provide support for women entrepreneurs and workers in non-traditional fields.

Celebrating Success Stories: Highlighting success stories and showcasing the achievements of women in non-traditional livelihoods can inspire others and challenge stereotypes. Celebrating diversity and inclusivity in the workforce is essential for creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

By implementing these recommendations and embracing the key takeaways from these models, we can create more opportunities for women in non-traditional livelihoods, break down gender stereotypes, and neutralise the gender disparity ratio in the workforce.

Acknowledgment

We appreciate Vedi and Harsh's enthusiasm, readiness to learn, engagement with the issue, and their diligence. We also recognise the contribution of Shruti Lal for facilitating meetings and documenting proceedings.

We are grateful for the support from the newly formed adolescent forum members in Khoda, who acted as a reference group and contributed their insights and recommendations. These members include Ruby, Rani, Priti, Anushka, Shaurya, Uttkarsh, Radha, Sanket, Fulnaj, Mahi, Manju, Anju, Shalu, Khushbu, Kajal, Muskan, Anjali, Riya, and Chaya.

We acknowledge the contributions of all community representatives, frontline workers, parents, caregivers, skilling partners, and leaders from community-based organisations and platforms who wholeheartedly shared their apprehensions, limitations, and aspirations, enriching the study. We could not have completed this study without their guidance and support.

We deeply appreciate the editing and re-drafting support of Sudhir Pillai and last but not least, we recognise the integrity and commitment of the CFAR project team, whose dedication and hard work were instrumental in the successful completion of this study.[1]

[1] All Photos: CFAR Archives 2024

Government Policies on Non-Traditional Livelihoods and Skill Development

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Central Government

Introduction

To transform India into a global skill capital, the Union Government has initiated several programmes for skill development for marginalized communities in both rural and urban areas. Some of the key government policies like National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. 2001; National Policy on Skill Development, 2009; NDSDE, 2015; STEP; and SANKALP focus of economic empowerment and improving quality of life of women and other communities living on the margins. As part of this study, we are focusing on three Central and two State government initiatives which have been systematically implemented.

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) was approved in March 2015, on the occasion of World Youth Skills Day, to address the skill gap. It is being implemented by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). This initiative aims to provide job-specific skill training to the nation's youth, aligning with key national missions such as Make in India, the Clean India Mission, and Digital India. PMKVY has undergone three revisions (PMKVY 1.0, PMKVY 2.0, and PMKVY 3.0) to address emerging needs and challenges, with the latest being PMKVY 4.0 (announced in the 2023-24 Budget), which focuses on aligning skill development initiatives with the current industry demands and incorporating technological advancements in training delivery.

Overview

PMKVY is India’s largest skill certification scheme, and its objective is to enable and mobilise a large number of Indian youth to take up outcome-based skill training, become employable, and earn their livelihood. By focusing on various industries, including construction and manufacturing, PMKVY seeks to equip young Indians with the skills needed to thrive in these

sectors and contribute to the country's economic growth. The scheme aims to cover 108 aspirational districts, 79 NE districts across 8 NE states, and 53 unserved districts.

Analysis

By 2022, PMKVY 3.0 had trained around four lakh candidates, though placement rates were notably low, with only 8% securing jobs. Moreover, the implementation of PMKVY has faced issues such as inefficient fund utilisation, with only 72% of allocated funds used in the 2021–22 period. The scheme's lengthy accreditation process for training centres and gaps in trainer quality further complicate its effectiveness. Despite these hurdles, PMKVY has established a robust framework for skill development, emphasising short-term training and recognition of prior learning. To enhance its impact, there is a need for better industry alignment, improved training quality, and more effective job placement strategies.

Implementation and Process

PMKVY applies to any candidate of Indian nationality who is unemployed, a school or college dropout, or is identified by the Sector Skill Council (SSC) as being suitable for their respective job roles. There are two major components under the scheme for which a customised implementation mechanism is in place. The Centrally Sponsored and Centrally Managed (CSCM) PMKVY is implemented through the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), with the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), the Sector Skill Councils, and the employers as the stakeholders, within the umbrella of the NSDC.

PMKVY offers Short-Term Training (STT) for school/college dropouts and unemployed youth, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for the existing workforce to recognise their skills formally, and Special Projects to address the needs of specific job roles or sectors not covered under the standard curriculum.

After successful training and assessment, candidates receive a certification, which is recognised by industry players. The scheme emphasises placements, and efforts are made to facilitate employment or self-employment for the trained individuals.

Beneficiaries

PMKVY's beneficiaries come from diverse backgrounds, including those from remote and unprivileged areas. The programme offers various training courses, from web development to organic farming, aiming to bridge the skill gap and enhance employability. PMKVY also emphasises on certification, which helps standardise skill recognition across industries. Despite these efforts, challenges such as ensuring quality training and job placements remain. However, initiatives like the Skill Hub Initiative and targeted programmes for sectors like healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight PMKVY's adaptive approach to emerging needs.

Challenges

Training Location vs. Job Location: A lot of people get trained and placed, but leave within a short period because the cost of living in the location they are posted to is too high. This occurs because training is conducted in one location, based on the availability of students, while the jobs are in some other locations where students cannot afford to migrate.

Focus on School Dropouts: PMKVY focuses more on school dropouts, whereas, graduates also require training and job counselling and are currently very frustrated due to unemployment. The weightage must be equal between graduates and school dropouts.

Mobilisation Support from the Government: Each job requires some unique personality attributes and attitudes, and hence, pre-assessment is required before training, which is a common practice in the private sector. However, PMKVY has not prescribed any pre-assessment guidelines. In addition, government mobilisation focuses more on youth aspirations than on basic suitability. This could lead to unnecessary training being given to the wrong candidates.

Takeaways

Broad Reach and Inclusivity: PMKVY has managed to train over 1.1 crore candidates across India by the end of PMKVY 2.0, reflecting its extensive reach and ability to mobilise a large section of the youth for skill development. The programme targets diverse demographics, including individuals from remote and underserved regions, aiming to make skill training accessible to all.

Industry-Relevant Training: The scheme emphasises aligning training programmes with industry requirements, which is crucial for enhancing employability. By collaborating with Sector Skill Councils and industry partners, PMKVY ensures that the skills imparted are relevant and up-to-date with market needs.

Adaptation and Evolution: PMKVY has evolved through multiple phases to address emerging challenges and improve its effectiveness. PMKVY 4.0, for instance, incorporates learnings from previous phases and focuses on integrating technological advancements and addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Standardisation and Certification: A significant aspect of PMKVY is the standardisation of skills through certification. This not only validates the skills of the trainees but also enhances their employability by providing them recognised credentials that are valued by employers.

In conclusion, PMKVY plays a crucial role in empowering the youth by providing them with the skills and opportunities to pursue non-traditional livelihoods. Through its targeted interventions and emphasis on gender equality, PMKVY is not only transforming individual lives but also contributing to the socio-economic development of the nation. However,

concerted efforts are needed to address existing challenges and maximise the programme's impact on adolescent girls and women's empowerment.

Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), by the Central Government

Introduction

The scheme of Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), formerly known as Shramik Vidyapeeth, is being implemented through a network of NGOs in the country since March 1967. The JSS scheme was transferred from the Ministry of Education (erstwhile MHRD) to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in July 2018.

Overview

JSS aims to improve the occupational skills and technical knowledge of the non/neo literates and persons with a rudimentary level of education up to the 8th standard and also school dropouts beyond 8th standard, i.e., up to class 12th, so as to raise their efficiency, increase their productive ability, and enhance their livelihood opportunities. It encompassing not only basic literacy and vocational training but also entrepreneurship development, health awareness, and environmental sustainability. By creating a pool of master trainers in skill development through training and orientation programmes, JSS collaborates and coordinates with all departments and agencies working in the field of skill development. Further, it promotes self-employment, and facilitates financial support, including loans, for the target groups through credit and consortium membership.

Analysis

Currently, the annual coverage of the beneficiaries is around 4 lakh, out of which 85% are women. This large number of women representations indicates the scheme's strong emphasis on gender inclusivity and empowerment. It underscores the scheme's effectiveness in addressing gender disparities in education and skill development, by providing women with the necessary resources and training to enhance their livelihoods and economic contributions. This focus not only promotes gender equality but also fosters broader socio-economic development by enabling women to play a more active and productive role in their communities.

Implementation and Process

The JSS scheme is implemented by the Directorate of JSS, which is a subordinate body of MSDE. Though JSS centres are located in both urban and rural areas, they are typically established at the district level, especially in rural areas, to target the marginalised and disadvantaged communities, those who are most in need of education and skill development support. While the exact number and distribution of JSS centres may vary over time, the scheme strives to ensure nationwide coverage to maximise its impact and reach.

Beneficiaries

The JSS scheme primarily targets the following groups as beneficiaries:

Rural Women: Women living in rural areas, especially those from marginalised communities, are a key focus of the JSS scheme. The programme aims to empower them through education and skill development, enabling them to enhance their livelihoods and contribute to their families' economic well-being.

People with disabilities: They constitute another important group of beneficiaries under the JSS scheme. The programme endeavours to provide them with inclusive education and training opportunities, enabling them to overcome barriers and participate productively in society.

Disadvantaged Youth: The JSS scheme often includes provisions for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, offering them opportunities for skill enhancement, entrepreneurship development, and career advancement. By investing in youth education and training, the programme aims to harness their potential as future leaders and contributors to the economy.

Overall, the Jan Shikshan Sansthan scheme aims to reach out to marginalised and vulnerable groups in society, providing them with the necessary education and skills to promote livelihood opportunities.

Challenges

Limited Reach: Despite efforts to establish JSS centres in various regions, reaching remote and isolated communities remains a challenge. Limited infrastructure and accessibility issues hinder the effective implementation of the scheme in some areas.

Resource Constraints: Adequate funding and resources are essential for the smooth functioning of JSS centres and its training programmes, and for the delivery of quality education. However, budgetary constraints and resource shortages limit the scope and impact of the scheme.

Quality of Training: Ensuring the quality and relevance of training programmes is crucial for the success of the JSS scheme. However, variations in the qualifications and expertise of

instructors, as well as outdated curricula and teaching methods, affect the effectiveness of the training provided at these JSS centres.

Retention and Dropout Rates: Retaining participants in JSS programmes and reducing dropout rates is challenging, especially among vulnerable groups facing socio-economic hardships. Factors such as lack of motivation, competing priorities, and family responsibilities contribute to the high dropout rates.

Takeaways

Targeted Approach: The JSS scheme demonstrates the effectiveness of targeting specific groups such as rural women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), minorities, and differently-abled individuals. By focusing on the unique needs and challenges faced by these groups, the scheme addresses disparities and promotes social inclusion.

Community Participation: Community participation and involvement are vital for the success of the JSS scheme. Collaborating with local stakeholders, including NGOs, government agencies, and employers, helps tailor programmes to local contexts, enhance outreach, and foster sustainability.

Holistic Approach: The JSS scheme adopts a holistic approach to education and skill development, encompassing not only basic literacy and vocational training but also entrepreneurship development, health awareness, and environmental sustainability. This comprehensive approach ensures that beneficiaries are equipped with a diverse set of competencies to thrive in various aspects of life.

Collaborative Governance: Effective governance and coordination among multiple stakeholders are essential for the successful implementation of the JSS scheme. Close collaboration between central and state governments, as well as partnerships with civil society organisations and private sector entities, contribute to the scheme's success.

Promotion of Lifelong Learning: The JSS scheme promotes lifelong learning by providing opportunities for individuals to acquire new skills and knowledge throughout their lives. This emphasis on continuous learning and upskilling is critical in a rapidly changing economic landscape.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), Central Government

Introduction

The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) is a flagship programme of the central government of India in the realm of urban poverty alleviation. It was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Poverty Alleviation (MHUPA) on 23rd September 2013 by replacing the existing Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana. This programme is a testament to the government's commitment to uplifting the urban poor by providing avenues for sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic empowerment.

Overview

DAY-NULM addresses urban poverty with an emphasis on non-traditional livelihoods. Instead of just handing out solutions, it provides the urban poor pathways to progress. Through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), training sessions, financial support, and by offering ample market opportunities, DAY-NULM attempts to empower individuals to sculpt their futures and break free from the chains of poverty.

Analysis

In embracing non-traditional livelihoods, DAY-NULM celebrates the myriads of talents within urban communities, recognising each individual as a potential catalyst for change. Nurturing entrepreneurship in unconventional sectors like handicrafts, renewable energy, and IT doesn't just unlock economic potential; it opens opportunities for innovation, creativity, and diversity, enriching the urban landscape. Moreover, by recognizing the essentiality of inclusivity, particularly for the marginalised groups, DAY-NULM ensures that the journey towards prosperity is one travelled by all, regardless of gender, age, or ability.

Implementation and Process

DAY-NULM isn't confined to the big cities; it's spreading its influence across every nook and corner of India's urban landscape. From bustling metros to smaller towns, its impact is felt everywhere. Thanks to smart partnerships with state governments, policy-makers, and local grassroots leaders, DAY-NULM is able to reach out to a wider cluster of urban dwellers.

Beneficiaries

Within the canvas of non-traditional livelihoods, DAY-NULM paints portraits of resilience, determination, and triumph. From artisans breathing life into their crafts to tech enthusiasts shaping tomorrow's digital landscape, the programme has empowered many urban dwellers to defy the odds and script their tales of success. Through mentorship, training, and financial support, DAY-NULM has managed to infuse dignity and hope into the lives of those once marginalised.

Challenges

Capacity Constraints: Implementation agencies, including State Urban Livelihood Missions (SULMs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), face capacity constraints in effectively planning, implementing, and monitoring DAY-NULM activities. Lack of trained personnel and technical expertise can hinder the efficient delivery of services and support.

Access to Credit: While DAY-NULM aims to facilitate access to credit for urban poor entrepreneurs, challenges such as stringent eligibility criteria, bureaucratic procedures, and high interest rates limit their ability to avail of formal financial services. Limited access to credit can impede the growth and sustainability of small businesses and self-employment ventures.

Inadequate Social Security Coverage: Despite efforts to provide social security benefits to urban poor households through DAY-NULM, coverage gaps still exist, particularly in terms of insurance and maternity benefits. Inadequate social protection measures can leave vulnerable populations at risk of financial setbacks and livelihood insecurity.

While looking at the transformative impact of DAY-NULM, we recognise that it's not just about economic upliftment; it's about nurturing a culture of resilience and togetherness. It's about paving new paths towards a brighter, more inclusive urban future. With DAY-NULM leading the charge, every individual, regardless of gender or background, becomes a beacon of change, guiding us towards a tomorrow where everyone has a shot at their dreams.

JEEViKA, Bihar Government

Introduction

JEEViKA Bihar, officially known as the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), was launched in 2007. JEEViKA Bihar operates through community-based institutions such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Village Organisations (VOs), and Cluster-Level Federations (CLFs). The programme emphasises on capacity building, skill development, and financial inclusion to enable rural households to engage in non-traditional livelihood activities such as agribusiness, livestock rearing, handicrafts, and non-farm enterprises.

Overview

JEEViKA Bihar is an innovative initiative by the Government of Bihar in collaboration with the World Bank. It aims at fostering sustainable livelihoods, reducing poverty by enhancing income generation, and improving the overall well-being of rural communities. With an emphasis on women's empowerment and livelihoods, particularly marginalised women, JEEViKA's aim is to diversify their economic opportunities across the state, and promote inclusive growth among them, by providing training, technical support, and market linkages.

Analysis

JEEViKA has achieved substantial results since its inception. Over 841,000 SHGs have opened bank accounts. More than 1.2 million farmers have been trained on improved agricultural practices. By promoting sectors with growth potential and value-added opportunities, such as agribusiness and non-farm enterprises, the programme addresses the challenges of agricultural stagnation and seasonal unemployment. Moreover, by empowering marginalised groups, including women and socially disadvantaged communities, JEEViKA contributes to social inclusion and poverty alleviation.

A study conducted for the World Bank by Upamanyu Datta, titled, 'Socio-Economic Effects of a Self-Help Group Intervention: Evidence from Bihar', suggests that JEEViKA has played an instrumental role in restructuring the debt portfolios of beneficiary households. It shows that households that have SHG members have a significantly lower high-cost debt burden, can access smaller loans repeatedly, and borrow more often for productive purposes when compared to households without SHG members. Since JEEViKA works by mobilising marginalised women into institutional platforms, such women demonstrate higher levels of empowerment, when measured in terms of mobility, decision-making, and collective action.

Areas of Implementation and Process

Initially, JEEViKA began in six districts and 42 blocks. Over time, it has scaled up to cover the entire state. The project has mobilised over 12 million rural women into more than 1 million SHGs. These groups are organised into 75,748 Village Organisations (VOs) and 1,670 Cluster-Level Federations (CLFs).

The project's livelihood interventions span multiple sectors, including farm, non-farm, and off-farm activities, ensuring inclusivity for all three categories of poor identified during the mobilisation phase.

Beneficiaries

JEEViKA refined its focus during implementation to target beneficiaries based on their assets, income, consumption, and well-being. The beneficiaries of JEEViKA are primarily women from poor rural households. These women are provided with various forms of support, including access to financial services, markets, and improved agricultural practices. This support aims to enhance their income and improve their overall quality of life.

Challenges

Training and Monitoring: Organising ongoing training, field demonstrations and cross-visits is difficult. Monitoring field visits are sometimes ineffective as some hamlets are empty. Specific cases of destitution, like single women, widows, and the elderly with no family, lack defined strategies. More data and exposure are needed for handling such cases.

Institutional Coordination: Assuming all community institutions will harmoniously include the poorest households is erroneous. Some dynamic leaders in VOs and CLFs have stayed in power too long, leading to favouritism and neglect of resistant villages. Financially better-off members often take larger loans, while discouraging poorer members from seeking loans. Strict leadership rotation and careful tracking of loan distribution are needed.

Participation of the Marginalised: Self-exclusion is common among the extremely poor due to their negligible assets and resources, leading them to perceive no direct benefits from livelihood interventions. The institutional structures and SHG norms, like weekly savings and meetings, are hard for them to adhere to. The SHG model's reliance on saving, group lending, and financial discipline often doesn't suit the ultra-poor, who struggle for basic needs. Vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and migrants also find it difficult to participate.

Takeaways

Community Leadership: To address the challenges, JEEViKA introduced scoping Community Resource Persons (CRPs) in 2011. These CRPs were trained in social mapping and participatory identification of poor households to ensure accurate targeting. Working closely with VOs, they identified excluded households and initiated home visits and counselling to integrate them into SHGs or mobilise them into separate SHGs.

Social Mobilisation: This is another critical strategy pursued by the VOs. Process monitoring initiatives identified that 15-20% of the rural poor, including extremely vulnerable households, migrants, and those with irregular incomes, remained mobilised. Targeted campaigns involving VOs successfully increased coverage of these households within SHGs.

Monitoring: Effective and timely use of project monitoring and MIS data was crucial for tracking excluded households and ensuring that interventions reached the most vulnerable populations, particularly women, and those engaged in non-traditional livelihoods.

JEEViKA Bihar exemplifies a transformative model for rural development and women's empowerment. By fostering financial inclusion, skill development, and market integration, the programme has substantially improved the livelihoods and well-being of millions of marginalised women across the state. As it continues to evolve, JEEViKA holds the potential to further enhance socio-economic outcomes and serve as an inspiring blueprint for similar initiatives nationwide, driving inclusive growth and poverty alleviation.

Mission Shakti, Odisha Government

Introduction

Mission Shakti in Odisha is a pioneering initiative aimed at empowering women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and community-based organizations. Launched in 2001, Mission Shakti focuses on enhancing the socio-economic status of women in rural areas by promoting entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and leadership development. The programme has been instrumental in fostering women's empowerment, economic self-reliance, and social mobilisation across the state of Odisha. Through capacity building, skill training, and access to credit and markets, Mission Shakti empowers women to become active participants in decision-making processes and agents of change in their communities. Overall, Mission Shakti catalyses women's empowerment and inclusive development in Odisha.

Overview

Mission Shakti aims to uplift women in rural Odisha by providing them with opportunities to engage in income-generating activities beyond traditional agricultural practices. The programme emphasises on capacity building, skill development, and access to resources such as credit and market linkages. By encouraging women to explore sectors like handicrafts, handloom weaving, and small-scale industries, Mission Shakti seeks to diversify livelihood options and enhance economic independence among rural women.

Analysis

Under Mission Shakti initiatives, women's SHGs are provided with interest subventions for bank loans up to Rs. 3 lakhs to undertake micro-entrepreneurial activities. This applies to those SHGs who have availed of bank loans and are making timely payments as per the bank repayment schedule. Mission Shakti's focus on non-traditional livelihoods represents a strategic shift towards inclusive and sustainable development. By promoting entrepreneurship and skill development in sectors with high growth potential, the programme addresses gender disparities in economic participation and fosters socio-economic empowerment. Moreover, by leveraging women's traditional knowledge and skills in artisanal and handicraft enterprises, Mission Shakti contributes to the preservation of the state’s cultural heritage and promotes rural entrepreneurship.

Areas of Implementation and Process

Mission Shakti is implemented across rural areas in Odisha through a decentralised network of women's SHGs and community-based organizations. The programme follows a participatory approach, wherein women are actively involved in decision-making processes related to livelihood generation and enterprise development. Capacity-building workshops, training programmes, and exposure visits are organised to enhance women's skills and knowledge in non-traditional sectors. Additionally, Mission Shakti facilitates access to credit through microfinance institutions and provides market linkages to enable women to market their products effectively.

People Benefitted

The age-wise distribution of Mission Shakti SHGs indicates that one-third (33%) of SHG members belong to the younger age group between 18 and 30. The economic status of the Mission Shakti-assisted SHG members across four districts in the KBK (Kalahandi Balangir Koraput) region of Odisha shows that more than three-fourths (80.1%) belong below the poverty line and have very poor (Antyodaya) backgrounds. However, as per available data, one-fifth (19.90%) of SHG members are above the poverty line, indicating that one-fifth of group members have moved out of poverty through SHG interventions across the four districts.

By engaging in activities such as handicrafts, handloom weaving, and agro-processing, women have been able to supplement their household income and improve their socio-economic status. Moreover, the programme has empowered women to take on leadership roles within their communities and this has contributed to the overall development of rural areas.

Challenges

Despite its many successes, Mission Shakti faces several challenges in promoting non-traditional livelihoods effectively. Limited access to markets, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of technical know-how pose significant obstacles to women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. Moreover, fluctuations in market demand and competition from cheaper mass-produced goods often hinder the growth of women-led enterprises. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts to strengthen market linkages, improve infrastructure, and provide targeted support to women entrepreneurs.

Takeaways

Emphasis on Entrepreneurship: Mission Shakti encourages women to become entrepreneurs by providing them with training in business management, marketing, and financial literacy.

This enables them to establish and manage their enterprises in non-traditional sectors, fostering economic self-reliance and empowerment.

Access to Markets: The programme facilitates access to markets for products created by women's SHGs and community-based oganisations. By linking them with market networks, both locally and nationally, Mission Shakti enables women to reach a wider customer base and sell their products at fair prices, thereby enhancing their economic opportunities.

Innovation and Technology Adoption: Mission Shakti promotes innovation and the adoption of technology to enhance productivity and competitiveness in non-traditional livelihoods. By introducing modern techniques and technologies, women can improve the quality and effectiveness of their products, making them more marketable.

Increased Participation in Elections: Evidence from the ground suggests that the intervention of Mission Shakti SHGs has empowered rural and tribal women and inculcated leadership skills among them in the elections.

Mission Shakti's emphasis on non-traditional livelihoods has emerged as a pivotal strategy for women's empowerment and rural development in Odisha. By diversifying economic opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship in sectors with high growth potential, the programme has laid the foundation for inclusive and sustainable growth. However, addressing the challenges of market access, infrastructure development, and technical support remains crucial to maximising the impact of Mission Shakti and ensuring the long-term viability of women-led enterprises in rural Odisha.

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Findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Brief Introduction

In Khoda Village Extension Colony, Ghaziabad, and Delhi NCR, adolescents face significant challenges that hinder their development and future opportunities. Khoda's economic activities are mostly gender-segregated: men work in factories or manage shops, while women engage in domestic or home-based piece-rate work. Although Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)-led skill development agencies exist, they focus mainly on traditional skills like sewing and beauty care, which are primarily meant for girls and so do not attract or benefit the boys living in Khoda.

Despite being part of the National Capital Region (NCR), Khoda suffers from inadequate government services perhaps due to its border location, affecting the development of adolescents, especially those from scheduled castes and minority communities. Poor infrastructure and sanitation, combined with a lack of nearby schools, disproportionately impact girls, affecting their education, health, and overall growth. These conditions exacerbate gender inequality, undermining girls' self-confidence and limit their opportunities. Promoting non-traditional livelihoods can address these issues by equipping adolescent girls with financial literacy and unconventional skills, challenging societal expectations and empowering them.

We conducted Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with adolescent girls and boys, their parents, the elderly, and frontline workers working in Khoda, to understand their point of view and the mindset of Khoda's population.

FDG 1: Adolescent Girls, 10th May 2024

Transcript Report

On 10th May, 2024, at the CFAR centre, Khoda, a comprehensive discussion ensued with the adolescent girls of the area. The conversation provided insight into the aspirations, challenges, and support systems for adolescent girls in Khoda, highlighting both the opportunities and barriers these girls face while pursuing their dreams and goals. This group included participants aged 15 to 22, with varying educational backgrounds and unique career goals. The conversation provided deep insights into their lives, reflecting broader societal norms and gender dynamics.

Introduction of Participants:

The discussion began with the participants introducing themselves.

- ✓ Manju, 17 years old. Completed the 10th-grade board exams
- ✓ Anju, 18 years old. Currently studying in 11th grade in the arts stream
- ✓ Shalu, 15 years old. Currently in 10th grade
- ✓ Preeti, 15 years old. Currently in 10th grade
- ✓ Fulnaaz, 15 years old. Currently in 10th grade
- ✓ Anushka, 15 years old. She has completed her 10th-grade and is looking forward to choosing the Arts stream for her 11th and 12th grades.
- ✓ Mahi, 16 years old. Currently in 10th grade
- ✓ Riya,16 years old. She has completed her 10th grade and wants to take the Commerce steam in the future.
- ✓ Kajal, 19 years old. Currently in 12th grade
- ✓ Khushboo, 18 years old. Currently in 10th grade
- ✓ Rani, 16 years old. Currently in 12th grade
- ✓ Muskan, 19 years old. Studied till 6th grade
- ✓ Ruby, 19 years old. Studied till 12th grade
- ✓ Chhaya, 22 years old. Studied till 9th grade

Family Structure and Employment:

Preeti: In total, we have six members in our family: our two parents, two elder brothers, and my sister and me. My father works as a daily wage labourer, while my mother works in fabric export, and one of my brothers works in marketing.

Shalu: I have six members in the family: my father, mother, elder brother, and three sisters. My mother is a stay-at-home wife and looks after all the housework while my father and brother work as labourers.

Chhaya: There are currently ten members in our family. Father, mother, we two sisters, two brothers, two sisters-in-law, and two nephews. All our family members are supportive of each other's ambitions, especially my sisters-in-law.

Anju: We have six members in our family: me and my sister here, Manju, our mother, father, and two younger sisters. Our father works as a daily wage labourer.

Anushka: My mother is a doctor, and she wants me to get into the medical field as well through further studies, but I want to become a dancer.

Future Dreams/Career Aspirations:

Khushboo: My main goal is the police force, otherwise, some field relating to fashion.

Muskan: I want to learn to stitch.

Chhaya: I want to learn computers and do a course to get a job in the future, like a manager's post or something similar.

Ruby: I have taken a beautician's course in the past, but I want to enter the healthcare sector by becoming a nurse.

Anushka: I want to become a dancer.

Riya: I want to do a UI/UX design course.

Anushka: I want to open my own dance studio here in Khoda to teach other children.

Chhaya and Ruby: We want to open our own beauty parlour in the future.

Preeti: I want to start with nursing and eventually become a doctor.

Rani and Fulnaaj: We want to work in a beauty parlour.

Kajal: I want to learn beauty parlour and stitching work. But, due to a combination of both my family's conservative views on women working and my own being a bit uncertain and afraid of the outside world, right now I have no interest in working at all.

Mahi: My elder sister is a beautician, so it is she who has inspired me. I want to do a beautician's course in future.

Gender Norms and Non-Traditional Livelihoods:

Shalu: There is a big chance that women here will face gender discrimination at a social level if they engage in non-traditional work; people may be judgmental or biased due to their working in traditionally men's jobs. They will also face physical challenges due to the physically demanding nature of some jobs.

Fulnaaz: My parents want me to complete my studies and then stay at home. But I want to work.

Collective Voice: Honestly, everyone here is tired of the societal pressures and opinions; people always have something to say. If our family supports us then that's all that matters.

Inspiration and Role Models:

Anushka: I have an aunt who is a dancer; she has inspired me a lot, and she is the reason I too want to become a dancer.

Riya: My elder brother is a UI/UX designer, and I want to follow in his footsteps.

Khushboo: There are many public figures, including female police officers, who I have seen many times in uniform. Their confidence and power, which radiate from them, have inspired me to possibly join the police force in the future.

Chhaya: I have other family members who have been working in the beauty parlour sector for quite a while; they have been a great source of inspiration.

Anushka: My hard-working mother has forever been my source of inspiration and someone to look up to.

Mahi: My elder sister is a beautician; she is the one who has inspired me

Recreation, Hobbies and Skills:

Mahi: I want to do a beautician's course in future.

Preeti: I want to do a nursing course and also learn English. My brother works in marketing, but he never tells me anything about it. So, I do not know much about marketing, but I am very eager to understand it.

Khushboo: I want to learn how to drive a motorcycle if there are available opportunities in Khoda.

Manju: I want to do a nursing course.

Anju: I want to do a computer course and learn how to operate a computer.

Shalu: I want to learn dancing and driving.

Rani, Muskan and Kajal: We want to learn beauty parlour work and stitching.

Chhaya: I have done a beauty parlour course in the past, but I want to learn further and become a makeup artist to then work as a beautician.

Riya: I want to do a UI/UX design course.

Anushka: I want to learn English.

Expectations and Support from Parents:

Shalu: My elder sister wanted to work, but our father forced her to marry. He has changed very much now. We do not quite know why; it just happened. Now, he has given us the freedom to choose what we want to do in the future.

Mahi: My parents want me to fulfil my dream of becoming a beautician.

Preeti: My parents expect me to complete my schooling with good grades and become financially independent in the future.

Snippets from the conversation with adolescent girls at CFAR Centre, Khoda

Conversation:

Fulnaaj: "They want me to complete my studies, then focus on learning Islam and stay at home."

Vedi (Interviewer): "Do you go to madrasas?"

Fulnaaj: "I do, and I teach there as well."

Anushka: My mother is a doctor, and initially she wanted me to get into the medical field as well through further studies, but I want to become a dancer. Now everyone knows about my dream, and they have been encouraging me.

Riya: My parents encourage me to study and then pursue my interests.

Rani: Right now, my parents' priority is for me to focus on my studies.

Reflective Voice

The girls discussed the challenges of pursuing non-traditional careers, and having to face gender discrimination and societal judgments. However, there was a notable presence of family support, particularly from parents who encouraged their daughters to pursue their dreams. They stated that they are done with

the opinions and prejudices of the society and what really matters is their family's support.

These young girls expressed a keen interest in learning non-traditional skills like driving cars and motorcycles, doing UX/UI courses, and taking up professional careers in dancing along with furthering their education. However, they also pointed out the lack of facilities and opportunities in their locality, which hinders their ability to pursue these interests to the extent they want to.

The expectations from parents varied, with some encouraging their daughters to become financially independent, while others expected them to focus on traditional roles at home. This dichotomy reflects the evolving yet complex dynamics within families regarding women's roles.

Conclusion

The focus group discussions provided valuable insights into the aspirations, challenges, and support systems of young women in Khoda. Despite societal and familial pressures, these girls have clear ambitions and are inspired by various role models. The conversation underscored the need for better facilities and opportunities to support their educational and career pursuits. The support from family members, especially parents, plays a crucial role in empowering these young women to break free from traditional gender norms and pursue their dreams. Moving forward, it is essential to address the gaps in resources and create an enabling environment that nurtures the aspirations of young women in similar communities.

FDG 2: Adolescent Boys, 7th May 2024

Transcript Report

On the 7th of May, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with adolescent boys from Khoda to explore the community's attitudes towards non-traditional livelihoods, especially concerning the engagement of women. The discussion aimed at understanding the general mentality towards jobs, potential opportunities for non-traditional livelihoods, and the existing challenges in this context. This report encapsulates the key points raised during the discussion, highlighting the boys' perspectives on women's involvement in non-traditional jobs and the broader socio-economic environment in Khoda.

Introduction of Participants:

The session commenced with participants introducing themselves.

Kunal, a 16-year-old who recently completed his 10th grade at Kondli Government School

Rohen, a 17-year-old studying in the 12th grade in the Arts stream

Inderjeet, a 15-year-old 10th-grade graduate

Gopal, who has studied till 10th grade and is currently not doing anything

Sundar, who is in the 11th grade at the Kalyanpuri Government School

Rupesh, the youngest of all, was not comfortable sharing his demographics

Rohit Kumar, who dropped out of school after his 11th grade to support his family

Veneet, who is not doing anything at the moment

Education and Career Aspirations:

Kunal: I wish to start a business after I finish my schooling, but there are no facilities that provide proper guidance here in Khoda.

Rohen: I wanted to study commerce initially, but due to less than required marks for the stream, I had to choose arts to study. The condition of schools here is not very good.

Inderjeet: There are a few members in my family who are in government service. They have always been the source of inspiration for me to pursue a career in the same field. They have influenced and motivated me to dedicate myself to prepare for exams in government service. They have also influenced me to look at my future ambition and motivation to help people.

Rohit Kumar: I had to drop out after 11th grade to support my family, but now both my working parents have motivated me to complete my education through open school and start working at the same time to support them the best I can.

Conversation:

Gopal: "I do have a dream. I want to earn money, but not sure yet how to do that."

Kundan (Interviewer): "Like Inderjeet said, he dreams of joining some sort of government service, his end goal is earning money, and he knows how to achieve that goal. Do you know how you will achieve your goal of earning money?"

Gopal: "Sir, there is a difference between joining government service and becoming the government itself."

The conversation indicates that adolescent boys in Khoda have diverse education and career aspirations but face significant challenges, mostly because of not having enough resources in the area they live in. There is a feeling of ambition and also dissatisfaction with their current situation that is shared collectively. For people like Gopal, money is the prime force that motivates them without any plan of execution, while Inderjeet and Kunal have set goals and are working in real time to achieve them.

Local Opportunities for Livelihood and Education:

Kunal: The labour requirements as well as the nearby paper market provide some opportunities for livelihoods.

Collective Answer: Most of the kids from here go all the way to the government schools in Delhi.

Collective Answer: People work in factories in Noida, but the income and conditions there are not good.

Inderjeet: Khoda does not have any library of its own. It would be very helpful for us students who want to study beyond our school books to have access to a library.

Rohen and Rohit Kumar: We want Khoda to have a technical computer course along with courses relating to cyber security and ethical hacking.

In Khoda, local opportunities for livelihood and education are limited. Many students travel to government schools in Delhi to study due to local inadequacies. Working in factories in Noida is common but they are poorly paid with poor conditions. Lack of facilities and guidance impacts the community's needs and hinders the aspirations of kids who wish to achieve something.

Gender Roles in Employment:

Gopal: If women start earning, that would save so many families. Because then women will not have to seek husbands based on their income.

Rohen: My father works very hard. He not only contributes to housework but also goes out to earn money.

Gopal: If the money is reasonable, both men and women should work. It is not a question of whether women should be allowed to work or not. They can work in government services, but they should not work as domestic helpers.

Conversation:

Deepak (Interviewer): “Can women work in traditional men's jobs, and men work in traditional women’s jobs?”

Gopal: “Sure, if it is an issue of money, it’s all right for them to work.”

Harsh (Interviewer): "If money is the entire motivating factor for you, how do you see it solving the issues you face every day? Can all issues be fixed by having an ample amount of money?"

Gopal: "Money can fix and buy everything. With money, you can buy power, people, relationships, everything."

Vedi (Interviewer): "If there is no financial issue, should they still work in non-traditional jobs?"

Rohen: "No. Girls should not work outside of the house if the financial situation is not very severe. If they have a working father or brothers, girls should not need to work outside."

The above statements give us an idea about the mindset of the boys on women's occupation outside their homes. While it is understood and agreed that if the female members of the family start working there will be more financial stability and less burden on the male bread earners, the stigma of women working outside the walls of the home is still present. Though there are responses in support of women working as well.

Community Leadership and Gender:

Inderjeet: Generally, I have seen that women community leaders are better at helping develop the community. In the streets, female members of public authorities are more active than their male counterparts.

Gopal: No one is doing anything for the community, regardless of their gender. Even if a woman leader is out in the streets, the results are minimal.

Recreation:

Gopal: Many boys and girls are involved in gaming; it helps refresh our minds.

Rupesh: Gaming, mainly PUBG, relieves the stress of daily life. It cures boredom and most people play it as a form of escapism.

Gopal: There is no actual money in playing PUBG, but some do bet money on matches.

Veneet: My hobby in general is to sleep.

Collective Answer: We like to stay outside the house and talk within our groups. Some of us often go for rides on bikes away from here.

Inderjeet: I like to go running in the morning, since I'm preparing for the civil services exam.

As mentioned by Rupesh, gaming is a means of escapism from the real world of Khoda. Bike rides away from home or just staying out of their homes indicate the inclinations of the boys towards the world outside.

Social Expectations and Pressures:

Gopal: We do not have much career options yet. Girls look for boys with proper means of livelihood when it comes to marriage. Financial stability is more important than family settlement. That is the main expectation from us, to provide.

Inderjeet: As Kundan Sir said, families get their son married if he is not responsible in life. I think this might work, maybe because, after marriage, the boy realises his familial responsibility, which forces him to change to ensure a future for his new family.

Rohen: There is pressure to complete one's education with a good percentage to create a better future for the family.

Gopal: The family taunts us for going outside the house all the time. While my two elder sisters are expected to stay at home and contribute to housework.

The dialogue reflects societal expectations and pressures faced by young men in Khoda. Gopal highlights the importance of financial stability in marriage prospects. Rohen notes the pressure to excel academically to build a future for the family. Gopal mentions restrictions on socializing for boys and expectations for his sisters to solely contribute to household chores. These remarks underscore the weight of financial responsibilities, familial duties, academic success, and social burdens on young men in the community.

Youth Engagement in Non-Traditional Livelihoods:

Inderjeet: It is all right to work in any job regardless of one's gender if the person is interested in it.

Gopal: Sure, if there is an issue of money in the family, it's all right for people to be involved in non-traditional roles at work.

Rupesh: It is all right, but girls need to be aware of their safety when working outside.

Rohen: It is both good and bad. Good for the family's stability, and bad because of the women working outside.

Inderjeet: All should work according to their situation and interests regardless of social norms.

Rohit Kumar: It is good for both to work to balance their families financially.

Inderjeet: Women should be able to drive e-rickshaws here in Khoda as well, but there is a concern for their safety. Physical fights between male drivers are very common here, and this raises concern for any women who would want to drive e-rickshaws here.

Conclusion

This focus group discussion with adolescent boys highlighted the evolving attitudes towards gender roles and employment in Khoda. While traditional views still hold sway, there is a growing recognition of the need for economic pragmatism and the benefits of women participating in non-traditional livelihoods. The boys' perspectives suggest a community in transition, grappling with its socio-economic realities while gradually embracing more inclusive attitudes towards gender and work.

The discussion concluded with participants voicing their final thoughts on non-traditional livelihoods. The consensus was generally supportive, with many agreeing that both men and women should work as per their needs and desires, irrespective of traditional social norms. Inderjeet succinctly summarized this sentiment: “All should work according to their situation and interests regardless of social norms.”

FDG 3: Parents of Adolescents, 8th May 2024

Transcript Report

This is the report of a session with the parents of adolescents in Khoda held on 8th May. Through their discussions, they shed light on the challenges faced by their community, such as limited access to educational resources, conservative societal norms, inadequate healthcare, and infrastructure issues. Their insights also emphasise the importance of parental support in children's education and the need for skill development courses to enhance professional opportunities.

Introduction of Participants:

- Bankelal works as a labourer.
- Satyapal works as a plumber.
- Kailash works as a labourer.
- Usha is a stay-at-home housewife.
- Saroj manages the house.

- Sanjana has a graduate degree in fashion design from Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute in Mayur Vihar Phase 3. But is currently a housewife.
- Priyanka is a stay-at-home housewife.
- Nilu is a stay-at-home housewife.

1. Parents' Support for Children's Educational and Career Aspirations:

Kailash:

If the girls are willing, then there should be no problem. There is only so much a free course can help with, sometimes more can be achieved with the proper resources and the attitude of the parents and the girls.

Whether girls want to work or study, the parents should focus on supporting them rather than being afraid of the community's opinion or mentality. We never used to even imagine women flying aeroplanes, let alone cars, but today, so many women are aeroplane pilots.

Every parent dreams of their child being successful. My main question is, what courses or facilities are you providing or are going to provide? If there is something we disagree with or something we agree with, I will tell you.

Satyapal:

There are many young people here in Khoda who can create a bright future for themselves if they are provided with the right opportunities and resources, but there are very few families who are capable of providing their kids with those resources.

Many families struggle to live on a minimum wage income, they struggle the most when the government facilities do not reach areas like Khoda.

Sanjana:

Families often fall short of being able to provide time and resources for the professional-level development of adolescents. A small stitching machine can be managed sometimes, but courses like computer training require more than what parents here can invest in.

2. Skill Development and Professional Training:

Need for skill development courses:

Sanjana: Stitching, computers, beauticians, and short-hand typing are some that come to mind as career-building opportunities with short courses.

Kailash: One of my daughters told me three years ago that she wanted to learn stitching. I saved a bit to buy her a sewing machine and got her enrolled in a training course. She did the training alongside her studies, is still stitching today, even for clients, and is earning a small amount on her own to keep as her spending money

Interest in new initiatives like coaching centres:

Usha: I would like a new, properly run coaching centre.

Kailash: A coaching centre would be the best for students, and it would make it easy for parents to feel safe sending their daughters.

Saroj: My daughter has expressed her desire to prepare for and compete in government service exams to pursue a government job. I hope a centre for competitive exam guidance opens.

3. Importance of job-focused courses over training-only courses:

Usha: One of my kids, who is currently in 8th grade, wants to learn English and computers. He says once he learns to read and speak English, he will be better able to operate computers, and in today's times, without knowing how to operate computers, it becomes very hard for someone to get a corporate job.

Kailash: Any professional course that needs to be considered, should be job-focused and not only training-focused. New courses should be provided with job opportunities as well, not just training.

Sanjana: The focus on skills like stitching should not stop at the point of learning how to stitch, but the trainees should have the opportunity to work more on that skill to convert it into a professional skill, like fashion designing. So that, after they have learned the skill, it does not stay restricted to the household, but they have the option of branching out and furthering their careers.

4. Societal and Gender Norms:

Conservative societal mindset and gender norms:

Saroj: We support such examples of workers, regardless of whether they are men or women, where both have equal opportunities when it comes to earning respectable livelihoods.

Sanjana: The mindset of the majority of people is quite conservative. But we individuals should focus on supporting and empowering such examples of women who can be inspiring for

others in the community to help change their mindsets. I support non-traditional roles for women, for example, female e-rickshaw drivers.

Bankelal: I decided to get my eldest daughter married instead of letting her work. After marriage, it is up to her in-laws whether she can work or not.

Sanjana: The reason behind what Bankelal Ji mentioned can be the old social stigma. But even if, after marriage, the in-laws agree to let their daughter-in-law work, many times these women, as they are now married, are burdened with the responsibility of managing the house, and also, their families cannot devote enough time on their professional possibilities.

5. Educational and Occupation Disparities:

Differences in educational opportunities and expectations between boys and girls:

Saroj: We see a duality in forcing boys to keep on studying when they do not want to, when, even if the girls are willing to study, either the family's situation or their opinion of women's education, restricts them from pursuing further education beyond high school.

Sanjana: I have some information regarding these things because I am a graduate, but right now I am struggling to get jobs because after finishing my graduation, sitting at home due to family restrictions resulted in my graduation being completely fruitless. Everyone should be given the chance to employ their professional abilities to empower themselves by working for their and their family's financial stability and development.

Saroj: There are expectations in society to keep our girls at home for sure, but we in our home do not force any pre-existing gender norms onto our children. They both work at home and outside as they see fit, based on what is available.

6. Healthcare and Infrastructure:

Lack of proper healthcare facilities and reliance on distant hospitals:

Kailash: There are not many options available for proper government-provided healthcare here. Most of the community is forced to gravitate towards government hospitals in Delhi, like the Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital, or they are forced to pay beyond their affordability to private hospitals.

Poor road infrastructure and water supply issues:

Sanjana: There is a severe lack of road infrastructure, which you can see right outside there; the main road has been unfinished for a very long time. Also, the water supply here is very bad; families have a very hard time here during the summers when there is the most need for water.

Substance Abuse and Safety Concerns for Adolescents:

Rising substance abuse among adolescents:

Priyanka: There is a rising substance abuse problem among adolescents, which surely makes us a bit hesitant about the circle of people our children interact with for their well-being and safety.

Interest in courses on self-defence and help for substance addiction:

Kailash: Yes, there could be a demand for courses on self-defence, or substance-abuse prevention courses today, whether it's for parents worried for their daughter's safety or for their kid's substance addiction. If they see the benefits of such courses, there might be much more interest in them.

Government Accountability and Community Issues:

Lack of proper schools, distance from schools, and inadequate medical facilities:

Kailash: There are specific issues like the lack of government senior secondary schools. Our kids are forced to go and study at schools in Kalyanpuri or Kondli. There are also inadequate medical facilities.

Satyapal: The long distance from schools is also a major roadblock when it comes to parents letting their daughters study. When my daughter was younger, I used to take her to school every day on my bicycle and then pick her up every afternoon after school, but as she grew up, it became harder for me to cycle her to school every day, so eventually, she had to leave school because we did not feel safe sending her alone this far just for school.

Saroj: There are no government specialty hospitals in Khoda; there might be a few dispensaries here, but for anything medically serious, we are forced to go far from home to Delhi.

Issues with government schemes, and poor water supply:

Satyapal: We often encounter issues with government-run schemes. For instance, many families here who qualify for Ration Card benefits are unable to access them for various reasons. A few years ago, we paid for the registration and creation of e-Sharam cards under a government scheme. However, despite paying for them, we haven't received any benefits from these cards in the last five years.

Sanjana: The water supply here is very bad: families have a very hard time here during the summers when there is the most need for water

Parental Aspirations for Children's Future:

Parents' hopes for their children's development and success:

Nilu: Kids and their families now seem more aware, as compared to earlier times; they are a little more conscious of the options available to them.

Observations on changing social views regarding gender neutrality and female empowerment:

Sanjana: The social views regarding gender neutrality, women's education, and female empowerment, have changed a lot, though there is much room for improvement.

Saroj: We want the best future for our children. We need to have trust in our children and their ability to make correct decisions for themselves. At the end of the day, we cannot keep an eye on them all the time or keep them locked within our homes. They need to go out and experience the world for themselves, and we need to let them explore while having trust in them.

Reflective Voice

The dialogue reveals deep-rooted challenges and evolving perspectives within the Khoda community. The parents' experiences underscore the significant impact of socio-economic factors on educational and career opportunities. The contrast between conservative societal norms and the aspirations for gender equality highlights the ongoing struggle for progress.

The emphasis on skill development and professional training by parents reflect a practical approach to improving the livelihood condition of the adolescents, while concerns about infrastructure and healthcare point to systemic issues that require government intervention.

The discussion also illustrates the complexities of balancing traditional roles with modern aspirations. While there is a clear desire for progress, deeply ingrained norms and economic limitations often hinder these efforts. The participants' call for better resources, infrastructure, and supportive policies indicates a community ready for change but constrained by its circumstances.

Conclusion

Despite these obstacles, there is a strong desire for advancement, particularly in education, skill development, and gender equality. The participants' insights reflect a need for comprehensive support from both government and community initiatives to address these issues effectively. By

fostering an environment that supports educational aspirations, skill development, and equitable opportunities, Khoda can move towards a more empowered and progressive future.

FDG 4: Adolescent Concerns of Elderly Community Members, 10th May 2024

Transcript Report

The transcript of the interview conducted on May 10 with elderly community members in Khoda highlights several key concerns and conditions of adolescents in the area; primarily, employment opportunities and water. Through the voices of the interviewees, a comprehensive picture emerges of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics impacting the youth in Khoda.

Introduction of Participants:

- Parvati, age 65, ex-Anganwadi worker
- Sudha, age 30, homemaker
- Asharfi Devi, age 80, home maker
- Roopa, age 35, homemaker
- Nawab Singh, age 66, vegetable seller
- Uday Veer, age 64, retired

1. Concerns About Adolescents:

Lack of employment opportunities:

Uday Veer: The biggest concern we have about the young, growing generation is the uncertainty and the lack of employment opportunities in Khoda.

Well-being and susceptibility to negative influences:

Sudha: We are also concerned about their well-being; we constantly fear they might fall under bad influences and start making poor life decisions.

2. Challenges Faced by Adolescents:

Water supply issues impacting daily life:

Uday Veer: One major issue we all face in the community is water supply unavailability, especially during the summers. The only relief we get from the government is the water tanker, which comes every 3 days, for which, as you can see, people have to join in long lines to get some water. This affects children as much as adults.

Education and unemployment:

Uday Veer: Proper education and unemployment are obviously some of the bigger challenges they face.

3. Community Support for Non-Traditional Livelihoods:

General support for employment, including non-traditional methods:

Uday Veer: We will always be supportive and in favour of jobs and employment.

Asharfi: Employment is always essential for the stability of the family.

Importance of acquiring and utilizing skills:

Sudha: Even if the livelihood is non-traditional, I believe it is more important to acquire skills and then have enough opportunities to utilise those skills through jobs.

Social stigma and safety concerns regarding women working outside the home:

Roopa: Yes, this stigma against letting women work outside the home does exist. People are often okay if the employment opportunity keeps women within the four walls of the house, like stitching, but they are against letting women work outside for many reasons. Some of them might be the old social mentality, or it can also be the family's safety concerns for the women if they are sent outside to work.

Uday Veer: It is still a social stigma for women to work jobs and be employed outside of their homes. Some people criticise them purely out of jealousy, but others are still rooted in their conservative ways.

4. Employment and Gender Norms:

Necessity of earning:

Uday Veer: Due to the current situation and the lack of effective government resources, the youth are forced to work in minimum-wage jobs such as labourers and vendors.

Parvati: Having jobs is very essential. Before my marriage, I used to work in an Anganwadi in Patna and earn around 15 thousand per month. But after my marriage, my husband did not want me to continue working, so I had to leave my job. After my husband's death, it became very difficult to manage the house while my kids were young. If I had kept working, the family's burden would have been lighter.

Gender bias in job opportunities:

Uday Veer: Men and women do not have equal opportunities for jobs, as men can normally get jobs that have minimum skill requirements, such as being employed as labourers or vendors. But the threshold for women and their required skills seems quite high, socially.

Parvati: Even today, though my daughter-in-law has a Bachelor of Arts degree, she cannot work as there are no opportunities for her to work here.

Sudha: Yes, there is a significant difference in job opportunities based on gender. But they are socially created, and I believe all should be allowed to work regardless of their gender.

5. Ineffectiveness of Government Programmes:

- **Uday Veer:**

Uday veer - Due to the current situation and the lack of effective government resources, the youth are forced to work minimum-wage jobs as labourers and vendors.

- **Nawab Singh:**

Not only in private matters, but these things happen in government-run schemes as well. Here, for example, so many families who qualify for the Ration Card benefits are unable to take advantage of any of its facilities due to many reasons. A few years ago, we paid money for the registration and creation of the e-Shram cards, which is a government scheme, but none of us have gotten any of its benefits in the last five years since we paid to get them made.

6. Support from Elders:

Instances of support from the community, such as facilitating computer courses:

Sudha: We support them whenever we can. For example, in the past, there were a few kids here who took part in a 6-month-long diploma course in computers through a private institute. Frustration with unfulfilled promises from both private institutes and government schemes:

7. Changes Over Time:

Lack of significant improvements in education, infrastructure, and healthcare:

Sudha: There have been no significant changes in recent years within the educational, infrastructural, or medical fields. The situation remains as poor as it was 10 or 15 years ago.

Uday Veer: There has been an improvement in the mindset of elderly people related to the stigma of women working outside, but nothing substantial.

8. Future Outlook for Adolescents:

Concerns about adolescents being forced into jobs unrelated to their skills and interests:

Sudha: The future of the upcoming generations in Khoda seems a bit rocky and unstable, as they will most likely be forced to find work wherever available, and not based on their interests or skills.

Uday Veer: With limited options that match their skills and interests, they will be forced to take whatever work they can find. This mismatch might leave them feeling unfulfilled, hindering both their personal growth and Khoda's future potential.

Reflective Voice

The conversations with the elderly reveal a community grappling with multiple interrelated challenges that inhibit the development and potential of its youth. Employment emerges as a critical concern, reflecting broader socio-economic issues. The scarcity of job opportunities forces adolescents into roles that do not align with their skills or aspirations, leading to potential long-term dissatisfaction and stagnation.

The discussion also underscores significant systemic failures, particularly in education and public services. The lack of reliable water supply, with a water tanker that comes once in three days being the only relief, is a critical issue affecting the lives of people living in Khoda, especially the adolescents and the elderly. There is a frustration towards the inefficiency of government programmes highlighting a broader issue of inadequate infrastructure and governance. According to the elderly population, these problems compound the difficulties faced by adolescents, making it harder for them to focus on personal and professional growth.

Gender norms and biases further complicate the scenario. While there is some indication of changing attitudes towards women working, traditional mindsets and safety concerns still significantly restrict women's employment opportunities. This not only limits their financial potential but also perpetuates gender inequality.

The support from elders, although present, is often thwarted by systemic inefficacies and unfulfilled promises. Instances like incomplete computer courses and ineffective government schemes erode trust in institutions and hinder community efforts to support youth development.

Conclusion

The future of adolescents in Khoda, as painted by the community elders, appears fraught with challenges. The combination of inadequate employment opportunities, systemic inefficiencies, and entrenched gender biases creates a tough environment for the youth. While there is some community support and a slight shift in attitudes towards gender roles, significant improvements are needed in education, infrastructure, and government services to create a conducive environment for adolescents to realize their full potential.

FGD 5: Frontline Workers at Khoda Dispensary, 10th May 2024

Transcript Report

This conversation was held on May 10 at the Khoda dispensary and involved the key frontline workers from the dispensary and women who have experience of going door-to-door to the families in Khoda—the ASHA workers. The discussion centered around healthcare services, the challenges faced by adolescents in Khoda, gender norms, parental involvement, and potential solutions for improving community conditions.

Introduction of Participants:

The conversation commenced with the frontline workers introducing themselves.

Chand Mohammad, the Block coordinator of the Khoda dispensary from UNICEF. He has been working with UNICEF since 2007 and in Khoda since June 2016.

Rashmi Sharma, works at the Khoda dispensary.

Sangeeta, an ASHA worker.

Akanksha, an ASHA worker.

Healthcare Facilities:

Char Muhammad: There are four dispensaries here in Khoda. Some of the facilities provided here for adolescents are:

- **Vaccination.**

Care and treatment against common health issues like fever and cold.

People with severe health problems are referred to government hospitals.

Checkups for hemoglobin, typhoid, HIV, and other blood tests.

There are no ambulance facilities available within Khoda dispensaries,

Visitina interiors of Khoda to interview the elderlv

but they come from the hospitals when called.

- **Concerns among Adolescents:**

Sangeeta: People who have ambitions and goals lack opportunities and proper resources for their education to further develop their skills to secure employment.

Chand Mohammad: I can go as far as to give an estimate that around 60% of the adolescents here are consuming or have consumed brain-stimulating substances like drugs at some point. It is indeed a rising issue perpetrated by the lack of education, job opportunities, and social awareness regarding this matter.

Rashmi Sharma: We do not see any such cases of substance abuse coming to the dispensary.

Chand Muhammad: All issues relating to health ultimately arise from a lack of hygiene and polluted living conditions. To name a few, skin irritation or itching caused by contaminated water or the issue of constant coughing, which they famously call 'Khanshi', are some of the most common health concerns faced by people.

Conversation:

Vedi (Interviewer): "Since water in Khoda is a major issue, are there any waterborne diseases present?"

Chand Mohammad: "We have not yet tested the water here, so we cannot say yet."

Vedi (Interviewer): "Testing is one thing, but do you see any symptoms here for such diseases?"

Chand Mohammad: "The stomach is the biggest cause of health problems, and what you eat will affect your health. I do not eat here; I only eat hotel food, but most of the families living here cook their food at home under bad hygiene conditions and most likely contaminated water."

Future Prospects for Adolescents (Education and Livelihood):

Akanksha: The future of adolescents seems uncertain. If you were to visit the slum areas, the kids there seem distant from schools and education.

Chand Mohammad: There are only four small schools within Khoda, which have to facilitate a population of more than seven lakh. Illiteracy and unemployment are the two major issues facing the community, stopping Khoda's growth.

Rashmi Sharma: There aren't many good livelihood opportunities in Khoda. Many are forced to go as far as Noida in UP to find some minimum-wage work to support their families.

Gender Norms and Non-Traditional Livelihoods:

Akanksha: We still see gender discrimination and it's based on whatever freedom is allowed to girls. Girls are forced to stay at home with a minimum allowance for going outside the house, while boys do not face such restrictions.

Rashmi Sharma: People should be supportive of non-traditional livelihoods. Women here are more active and ambitious as compared to men. Men here are often ambitionless and aimless.

Parental Involvement and Ambitions:

Akansha: Many people think it will be best for their kids to live life as they did. In homes where both parents are working to earn a bit of financial stability, men usually work as daily wage labourers, while women work in the commercial sector, like fabric export, toy making, packing, etc. This often leaves the children with no supervision and free to use their own devices to spend time.

Sangeeta: The elders of the community and the parents need to widen their thinking horizons with new perspectives, whether towards their kids' dreams or the changing gender norms. Only then can they help the kids develop their ambition and motivation.

Solutions:

Chand Mohammad: In Khoda, people lack awareness of their own citizens' rights.

In the beginning, people were not aware of the effectiveness or importance of vaccinations, but, through enough effort and hard work, we were able to change that.

Similarly, there is a need to raise awareness in the direction of non-traditional livelihoods and help lower their ignorance.

Just today I was at a meeting in a Masjid to raise awareness among young children and their parents about vaccinations. I found that our ASHA workers go there to make people aware of vaccines, and to other remote places where I cannot reach.

Akanksha: There is also a major need for parents to pay more attention to and care for their kids' future. It can be said that it is not only the kids who lack ambition, but also their parents who lack ambition for their future.

The discussion at the Khoda dispensary revealed significant challenges in healthcare, education, and employment within the community. Substance abuse, poor hygiene, and inadequate educational facilities contribute to the uncertain future of Khoda's adolescents.

Moreover, we learned about two sections of people within the society. First, where traditional gender norms further restrict opportunities, particularly for girls. Another, where women are not only ambitious but also active in society.

Raising awareness is crucial for addressing these issues. Chand Mohammad emphasised the importance of educating the community about vaccination and extending this effort to non-traditional livelihoods. Engaging parents and the elderly in this educational process is essential for fostering adolescent ambition and motivation. There is a pressing need to improve educational facilities, create local job opportunities, and challenge existing gender norms to ensure a better future for the youth of Khoda.

Key Informant Interviews with Stakeholders and Partners

Stakeholder 1: NIESBUD, 15th May 2024

Transcript Report

This detailed conversation with Mr DK Singh, the Director at NIESBUD Noida Centre, and Ms Divya Aggarwal, Training Coordinator at NIESBUD, conducted on May 15th, captures the challenges faced by the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD), and the efforts made in empowering young adults and adolescents, particularly women and girls, through various training programmes.

Resources and Facilities Provided by NIESBUD:

DK Singh:

The focus of the training revolves around both skill and personal development. Our aim is not only to teach the required skills about business but also the art of entrepreneurship. Our training consists of the following parts:

Technical training

- Marketing training
- Legal and business knowledge

Interviewing the ASHA workers and doctors at the Khoda Dispensary

- Government schemes and facility knowledge.

Mentorship is the post-training stage. Market surveys, exposure, financial sponsors, and many other challenges are faced by trainees after they finish their training and try to open their businesses. To tackle these challenges, they require support, for which mentor guides provide them post-training on real-world problems.

Divya Aggarwal:

NIESBUD incubation centres provide all the material that would be required for the training while also keeping its focus on holistic development. The training programmes focus not only on the technical aspects but also on the personal, holistic development of the individual participant.

Challenges with Female Trainees:

Divya Aggarwal:

Though some women do go beyond the initial training to post-training, there is a huge drop-off between their completing the course and their working after the course.

Programmes for Adolescents:

Divya Aggarwal:

NIESBUD focuses more on entrepreneurship; therefore, our target audience normally is participants from 18+ age groups, though, for the younger demographics, we run awareness programmes.

We work with different ministry programmes. For example, right now we are working with the Directorate General of Training (DGT) on their STRIVE project, which aims to make adolescents aware of all the government ITIs through an entrepreneurship awareness programme and an entrepreneurship development programme.

Programmes for Participants Aged 18 and Above:

Divya Aggarwal:

For age groups 18 and above, we also have an entrepreneurship development programme and an entrepreneurship cum skill development programme that aims more at promoting self-development.

Course Structure:

Divya Aggarwal:

The training courses are usually 2-3 months long, with daily weekday training of 4-5 hours depending on the particular batch.

If we are talking about non-sponsored programmes that require a nominal fee from the participants, such programmes can be run whenever we have enough participants to form a batch. But in the case of sponsored programmes, we need to wait for funding before starting the programme.

We usually get funds from the government, but also through CSR activities from the public as well as the private sector.

DK Singh:

We either rely on government sponsorship or the courses are offered as non-sponsor courses. And in case the courses are non-sponsored, then we discuss it with the management to reduce the training fee as low as possible for trainees coming from marginalised communities.

The Trainees:

Divya Aggarwal:

If I had to guess, I would say around 200–300 participants enrolled in our programmes last year.

The participants have mostly been from Khoda for the past ten years, but we also see many participants from Makanpur, Noida, and other nearby places.

Course Popularity and Participation:

DK Singh:

The most popular training programmes that girls and women mostly gravitate to are stitching, beautician, and bakery. We also have mobile repair and other non-traditional courses, but they do not attract many female trainees.

Divya Aggarwal:

The programmes are not divided based on gender, but quite a few men take part in stitching and bakery courses.

The dropout rate during the courses remains very low. The commercial impact of NIESBUD has certainly improved, increasing public trust and motivation due to the lure of government certifications and their want of higher living standards, which has motivated communities towards taking active action in improving their financial condition, which has resulted in a steady increase in participation.

Promotion of other Programmes:

Conversation:

Vedi: "Other than the popular training programmes, how is the participation in other programmes?"

Divya Aggarwal: "There is zero participation in other programmes."

Vedi: "Do you have any plans to promote these courses in the future?"

Divya Aggarwal: "Not right now. Our focus now is solely on the three popular programmes, the traditional ones: beautician, stitching, and bakery."

DK Singh:

We also have electrical and home appliances courses and training available here right now which comes under non-traditional livelihood. Others can be introduced as well if we can find proper trainers and batches of willing trainees to participate.

Challenges for NIESBUD:

Divya Aggarwal:

There were challenges in the beginning regarding the participation of females, but because NIESBUD has been working for a long time now, it has created enough trust within the communities, so, parents are willing to send their kids now for training.

DK Singh:

Most people are more interested in sponsored programmes, which can be challenging for us as it is difficult to provide all the time.

Challenges for New Organizations like CFAR:

Divya Aggarwal:

The biggest challenge would be motivating people to join. If they have to pay for the programmes, then there might be a bigger challenge in mobilising enough participants for the training courses. Even if the programmes are sponsored and free of charge for the participants,

you still might need the lure of a stipend or other immediate benefit to get enough participants needed for a batch.

Collaboration with NIESBUD:

Conversation:

Divya Aggarwal: "If the organisation has a history of working in this sector, they can approach us and submit their details, on which basis we can decide on a further course of action for collaboration."

Deepak Sharma: "If we schedule a training programme by securing a group, can NIESBUD provide us with any facilities to run the programme?"

Divya Aggarwal: "Guest instructors can be provided, but not on a permanent basis."

Arranging Training Facilities:

Conversation:

Deepak Sharma: "Sir, if we could collect a batch for mobile repair training, taking participants from Khoda, would it be possible for NIESBUD to arrange the required facilities for their training?"

DK Singh: "Sure, you can. There are a variety of sponsored as well as non-sponsored training programmes with minimal charges available here."

Reflective Voice

The conversation highlights the critical role of NIESBUD in fostering entrepreneurship among youth, especially women, through diverse training programmes. The emphasis on holistic development and post-training support reflects a comprehensive approach to empowering trainees. The challenges faced, particularly in sustaining engagement post-training and mobilising participants for non-sponsored programmes, underscore the need for continuous support and innovative engagement strategies.

NIESBUD's reliance on government and CSR funding indicates a stable but potentially limiting financial model. The low participation in non-traditional courses suggests a cultural and societal preference for traditional roles among women, highlighting the need for targeted awareness and promotion strategies.

The steady increase in participation and trust within communities demonstrates NIESBUD's positive impact, yet the significant drop-off post-training suggests a gap in transitioning skills into sustainable employment or entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

CFAR's Team having a telephonic conversation with DK Singh at NIESBUD Library

In conversation with Ms. Divya Aggarwal at Training Centre

NIESBUD plays a pivotal role in empowering youth with entrepreneurial skills and balancing technical training with personal development. While popular courses like stitching, beautician, and bakery see high participation, challenges remain in engaging women in non-traditional roles and ensuring sustained post-training employment.

Stakeholder 2: JSS, 15th May 2024

Transcript Report

The conversation with Mr. Rajendra Singh, the Director of the Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) showcases the efforts, challenges and success of JSS in training women and youth to become self-independent citizens to improve the overall productivity of the population.

The Inception of JSS and its Aim:

Rajendra Singh:

JSS started as a government scheme in 1967 to provide training to women belonging to factory-working families. It was quite common then for the males of the families to work in industrial factories, while adolescents and women were left at home. JSS's aim from the start has been to increase productivity among women and youth by giving them proper education, training, and opportunities for financial independence. After all these years, JSS is now present and operating in 304 districts all over India.

Creating Trust and Improving Participant's Seriousness:

Rajendra Singh:

Many people can sometimes be skeptical about free courses as they feel they lack seriousness and effectiveness. To tackle this initial hesitation, we run programmes that cost 1 rupee per day to give people some faith and assurance in the training. We have witnessed that when participants pay a fee, regardless of how small, they take the training course more seriously and have more of a sense of accountability.

The Reason Behind JSS's Success

Localized Training Centres and Trainers:

Rajendra Singh:

The beauty of JSS lies in its localised trainer system. By connecting learners with instructors from their area, JSS eliminates long commutes, saving precious time and energy. This familiar environment can also make learning more comfortable and less stressful. Furthermore, a local trainer might share similar cultural backgrounds, leading to better rapport and understanding.

2. Informal Training Schedule:

Rajendra Singh:

These local trainers often offer more flexible scheduling options to fit individual needs. For the convenience of the students, we subscribe to a flexible informal form of training that does not restrict the learning hours to fixed times but can be adjusted for the best efficiency. But maybe that will change in the near future as the government is asking us to rather focus on a formal and strict schedule for the training.

Number of Successfully Trained Individuals and the Gender Ratio Split:

Rajendra Singh:

According to our data collection, JSS has trained around 26.3 lakh individuals, and JSS has maintained a very impressive overall ratio where around 85% of the participants are females from all across the country.

Further Progress and Initiatives in Future:

Rajendra Singh:

We are now increasing our efforts in the remote rural sections of the country as well. When it comes to initiatives, things are changing and moving too fast currently. The most common courses are sewing and stitching, but we are looking into options to diversify into other courses. We are currently considering introducing new programmes in the field of machine learning and AI for women to make them ready for the upcoming changes in the job market.

Challenges Faced by JSS in their Operations:

Rajendra Singh:

There are many challenges, for example, restrictions about training space, which limits the size of the batches, and also restrictions when it comes to funds. The government has also changed their process of paying the training staff, where now they are paid based on the training hours. They usually get paid 6 to 6.5 thousand rupees per month directly into their bank accounts.

Women's Empowerment and the Focus on Non-traditional Livelihoods:

Conversation:

Vedi: "What would you define as your main aim when it comes to empowering women?"

Mr. Rajendra Singh: "We focus directly on the aspect of our trainees becoming self-sustaining individuals and on their individual development, so they can get access to all the required resources they need to sustain their lives."

Vedi: "What are some examples of where JSS works in training participants in non-traditional livelihoods?"

Mr. Rajendra Singh: "There are many new training initiatives that cover non-traditional methods of livelihood, which we cover here. Our new Solar PV project, retail, and two- and three-wheeler repair work are some of the examples."

Employment Opportunities and Course Dropouts:

Rajendra Singh:

No, we do not focus much on providing employment. We aim to empower young individuals by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive independently. We believe that when the youth are given the right resources and support, they can create their own paths to success. Our programmes are designed to nurture personal growth, innovation, and resilience, ensuring that the youth are prepared to navigate and succeed in an ever-changing world.

Conversation:

Vedi: "What is the rate of dropouts?"

Mr. Rajendra Singh: "We try to find and work with individuals who are interested and can invest their time in the programmes, resulting in very low dropout rates. If the trainees start dropping out of the courses, the government deducts from the entire pool of funding we receive."

Mr. Rajendra Singh and CFAR having a conversation in his

The Difference Between Government's Target and the Reality of the Participating Demographics Based on Gender:

Rajendra Singh:

The current gender ratio here at our centre might be 85% of the participants being women, which resonates with the overall gender ratio. But the government has its aim set at improving the ratio a bit in favour of involving more male participants to get closer to a ratio of 60% women and 40% men. JSS and the government are also looking forward to providing training opportunities to individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ demographic as well. Currently, we do not have any substantial number of LGBTQ+ individuals training with JSS.

Creating Faith and Increasing Participation:

Rajendra Singh:

The first step should be to generate faith within the communities. We work to change the communal mentality by providing achievable incentives and showing the successful reality of other participants. The age group designated by the government for the programmes is between 16 and 45 years of age, but this centre particularly focuses on people within the age group of 20 and 40 years, who are generally the most motivated and willing to learn.

Reflective Voice

The conversation with Mr Rajendra Singh highlights the significant strides made by Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) in empowering women and youth across India. Through its localized approach, flexible training schedules, and nominal fee structure, JSS has successfully fostered an environment of trust and commitment among its participants. The organisation's emphasis on self-sustainability over direct employment aligns with its mission to equip individuals with the skills and confidence to navigate an evolving job market independently.

Despite social and financial limitations, JSS boasts impressive results. A staggering 85% of their participants are women! Looking ahead, JSS plans to expand into rural areas and offer new programmes in cutting-edge fields like machine learning and AI. However, achieving a more balanced gender ratio and including marginalised communities like LGBTQ+ individuals remain critical areas for growth.

By continuing to adapt and innovate, JSS is further enhancing its impact, contributing significantly to the socio-economic development of India's underserved populations. The commitment of JSS to individual empowerment and its adaptability to changing circumstances serve as a robust model for vocational training and community upliftment.

Conclusion

Since its inception in 1967, JSS has grown to operate in 304 districts, effectively addressing the need for vocational training and self-sufficiency. JSS has cultivated a culture of trust and accountability among its operating communities. The ongoing efforts to balance gender participation and include marginalised groups highlight JSS's commitment to inclusive growth and empowerment, solidifying its role as a catalyst for social and economic progress.

Stakeholder 3: ISRA, 17th May 2024

Transcript Report

The interview on May 17th with Mr Abhishek Agrawal (co-founder) highlights the important social role played by the Institute of Social Responsibility and Accountability (ISRA), a non-profit organisation registered under the Indian Trust Act, in creating awareness about welfare schemes for marginalised citizens, and their focus on sectors like livelihood, education, health, and more.

Introducing ISRA:

Abhishek Agrawal

The Institute of Social Responsibility and Accountability, or ISRA, is a non-profit organisation, which basically focuses its work on government welfare schemes all across India. Along with this, we also work on livelihoods, digital literacy and cybersecurity, and many other sectors, but our core area of work is in social protection and government schemes.

ISRA's Initiatives for Social Protection:

Abhishek Agrawal:

We have seen that the other bodies involved in social protection like SHGs, cooperative societies, and NGOs, often provide training, like achaar/papad making, or stitching, but the participants after the training are unable to market themselves or grow due to the lack of official documentation. For example, let us say they provide food-making/packing training to women, but if they do not have a license, it will restrict their sales options from platforms like Swiggy or Zomato. Or if someone is making soaps, but requires a cosmetic license. In such cases we have two working models to help SHGs or other bodies working in the social protection sector.

The First Model

Abhishek Agrawal:

The first model works with SHGs which are already established, by helping them through their documentation process, which is the biggest challenge facing them due to the financial requirements in the process of obtaining a license, while also aligning them with any of the government schemes which their SHG might fall under, to insure fluid operations and the best opportunity for growth.

The Second Model, 'GARV'

Abhishek Agrawal:

Our other programme is called 'GARV' with its motto, 'Learning and Earning = GARV', which focuses on the earning phase of the participant's development after the learning phase. It aims to promote efforts towards self-earning after the training.

ISRA's Role in Empowering Other Organisations:

Abhishek Agrawal:

As ISRA works across India and is connected with 79 other organisations as our partner-organisations, we support funding to many organisations in states and cities like Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Delhi. So, we work with such organisations that are already doing substantial work with enough participants, but are struggling due to the lack of resources such as properly structured curriculums, training modules and tracking modules, or they do not have properly established contacts with buyers and sellers. We help such organisations that possess the needed infrastructure and required human resources, by providing them with the required funding.

Direct Efforts of Empowering SHGs

Abhishek Agrawal:

In many cases, we take direct action by sending our teams to train women in different fields, and after the training, if the women are not already in an SHG, to motivate them into forming one of their own. If in case the SHG already exists, we help them through the process of converting their unofficial SHGs into registered cooperatives. Because SHGs are not legal entities, they get recognised legally only when they are converted into either NGOs or cooperatives. The newly formed Ministry of Cooperation has its main focus aimed at cooperative societies. By being mentored by the new ministry and by converting pre-existing SHGs into cooperative societies, the women are often provided with better opportunities and can market themselves at a higher level. This initiative of ours is currently functioning in five states.

Limitations Faced by SHGs:

Abhishek Agrawal:

SHGs are a very old concept, known in Hindi as, 'Swayan Sahayata Samuh'. What usually happens is that, in a village, about 10 women with similar mindsets and goals come together to form their SHG to help themselves and try to become self-sustainable businesses. But there may be a few limitations, such as:

- Lack of official documents which they need when trying to upscale their business.
- Lack of human resources.
- Lack of sponsorships.
- Lack of growth opportunities due to limited members as compared to cooperatives.

The Number and Gender Ratio of Participants Across India:

Abhishek Agrawal:

The data we currently have is of about 800 participants working with us across India. We mostly include women and differently-abled individuals. However, some of the financial cooperative societies have hired male members as well.

Conversation:

Vedi: "Generally, during the documentation process, what are the most common professions which are highlighted?"

Abhishek Agrawal: "Normally, we get a lot of people registering for their business for making decorative items and food licenses, while businesses relating to stitching also seem quite popular."

Holistic Development:

Abhishek Agrawal:

All the training courses are focused on the holistic development of the participants. The first day of training does not actually start with the training process, but focuses on raising awareness and counselling for participants who have to manage their homes, this training, and in the future, their jobs, all together. The training process also deals with aspect such as personality development of the participants, teaching them how to work in professional settings, how to make business deals, how to work with suppliers and customers etc. Merely by teaching someone to stitch, we cannot ensure success for their business. We have to cover other businesses and entrepreneurial aspects as well, like supply and demand, competitors, branching, upscaling their business, marketing etc.

Partnership with ATO Motors, and Empowering Women with a Non-Traditional Livelihood:

Abhishek Agrawal:

We are currently partnering with ATO Motors, to provide an opportunity for women who want to learn to drive along with the determination to earn their financial independence by working as female drivers. With our partner, we are currently operating only in Delhi, but soon we are looking to expand to Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra as well.

The Process:

Abhishek Agrawal:

Interested women who want to join the programme, apply directly to us at ISRA. After this, our team determines the number of women who are eligible to join the programme and invites those who qualify for the training which is free of cost. If the women are from North Delhi, they are trained in Burari, if they are from South or East Delhi they are trained near Sarai Kale Khan. After the training process, the women are given autos to drive daily and are placed at the nearest metro station from their homes.

The Eligibility:

Abhishek Agrawal:

The eligibility criteria are as follows:

- The age should be between 18 to 40 years
- They should not have any young children as it becomes very hard for them to manage work and their newborn kid at the same time.
- No serious medical issues like high blood pressure or high sugar levels.

Challenge:

Abhishek Agrawal:

A major challenge we faced was participants leaving after the driving training process because their goal was just to learn how to drive and not to actually work. So now the new rule on this is that we sign a legal agreement with all the participants before they enter the training programme, that they must work at least 6 months after the training is done. If they leave before that, they have to pay a fine of 20 thousand rupees.

Conversation:

Vedi: "How do you track the participants to make sure they stay employed till the 6 months mark?"

Abhishek Agrawal: "We are about to start a new initiative through which we are also aiming to provide women with digital literacy as well, such as, providing them knowledge of mobile UPI, Ola, Uber and other features like that. Also, the e-rickshaws and autos will have tracking systems built into them which track how many kilometres the vehicle has moved, where it is travelling and all data like that, through which the company keeps us in the loop to update us on all the new female drivers working within their 6 months contract."

Vedi: "How frequently are they tracked, and roughly how much money do these women make in a month?"

Abhishek Agrawal: "Let us say a woman driver who lives in Dwaraka has been assigned to the Dwaraka Metro station. Every day when she returns the auto to the station for its charging and maintenance, all the data is tracked then. This is their daily routine. When returning the auto, the woman also has to pay 500-800 rupees daily regulated by the company itself, against which the company pays them a monthly salary of 15 thousand rupees."

Participation and Women's Health Challenges:

Abhishek Agrawal:

There is no real challenge when it comes to participation. We face challenges when identifying the best candidates to train, who would work the hardest and benefit the most from this initiative due to the sheer number of participants we get. When it comes to health issues, the women go through regular health checkups to make sure they remain physically fit to keep on working. The company requires the drivers to work at least 25 days in a month, the rest they can take as leave. In case someone is ill and cannot work, they are allowed to show their authenticated medical certificate and get their salaries. The process is almost the same as offices.

The Driving Mindset:

Abhishek Agrawal:

The main driving force for these women and their mindsets differ from individual to individual. Many times, it depends on their background of origin; some are looking for financial stability after COVID, and some might be searching for their own unique individualities. Whatever their motivation might be, it is for sure that they go onto the streets with a very strong mindset. Facing gender discrimination from society, and disagreement about their work from their families, they face all these with such strength which is within them. So, when we talk about 'Women's Empowerment', I feel we need to focus more on 'Women's Development' as women are already empowered; they have the strength to face anything, they just need enough opportunities to shine and create a professional life for themselves.

Conversation:

Harsh: "Is the company these drivers work with privately run or is it a governmental organisation?"

Abhishek Agrawal: "These drivers are hired by ATO Motors itself, which is tied up with the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) to provide training and employment to women."

Harsh: "What is the employment relation between these drivers and DMRC? Are there drivers considered full-time employees and hence subjected to all employment benefits set by the government, or are they just on contract and only get the benefits, if any, which are already mentioned in the contract?"

Abhishek Agrawal: "They are under full-time employment hence they get healthcare and all the other employment benefits according to the government guidelines. They are legally employed workers."

Vedi: "How long have GARV and the female auto drivers' initiative been working for?"

Abhishek Agrawal: "ISRA itself was started only in 2019. The GARV project has been in operation for 2 years, and the female auto drivers' initiative for 1.5 years. It has been through much hard work that we have made this much progress within this short time."

Reflective Voice

ISRA, by focusing on the intricacies of government welfare schemes, addresses critical gaps in social protection, emphasising practical solutions for documentation, training, and sustainable livelihoods.

Through initiatives like the documentation support for Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and the 'GARV' programme, ISRA systematically dismantles barriers to economic empowerment, ensuring that training translates into tangible earning opportunities. The collaborative efforts with 79 partner organizations further amplify ISRA's impact, providing essential resources and structuring to grassroots entities struggling with financial and logistical constraints.

The organisation's innovative partnership with ATO Motors highlights a non-traditional livelihood model, empowering women through driving training programmes. Despite challenges such as participant retention, ISRA's implementation of legal agreements ensures sustained employment and financial independence for these women.

Conclusion

ISRA's direct intervention in training and formalising SHGs into cooperative societies exemplifies its commitment to elevating women and differently-abled individuals. By transforming informal groups into legally recognised entities, ISRA enhances their access to broader markets and opportunities, particularly under the new Ministry of Cooperation.

Abhishek Agrawal's reflections underscore a broader narrative of resilience and empowerment. By addressing systemic issues and fostering holistic development, ISRA not only supports individuals in overcoming immediate hurdles but also nurtures a stronger, more inclusive society. The underlying message is clear: while women already possess inherent strength and determination, they require structured opportunities and support to fully realise their potential and achieve lasting success.

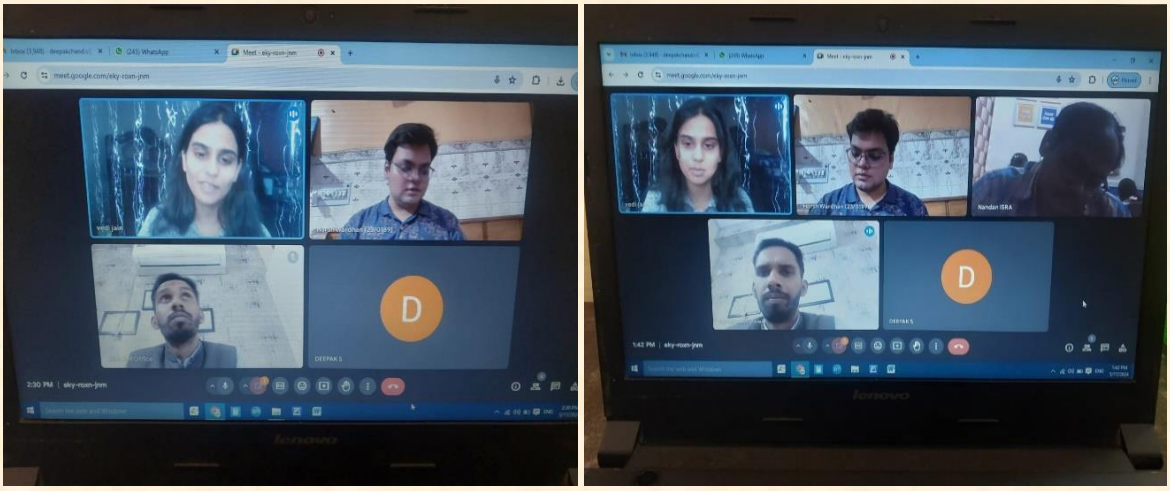
Stakeholder 4: Public Health Centre, Khoda, 15th May 2024 Transcript Report

The interview with Dr Alka Bhardwaj, who has been working at the Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Khoda since 2015, delved into various community issues, including adolescent health, gender dynamics, educational standards, societal acceptance of non-traditional work, and healthcare practices.

Communal Mindset on Changing Gender Dynamics:

Dr Alka:

The mentality here is pretty conservative; people with diverse cultural backgrounds come here from different parts of India, so each of them has their own social-cultural influences and mindsets, and those who are living in joint families might have more restrictions. They might



Snippets from the virtual interview conducted between ISRA's co-founder Abhishek Agrawal and CFAR

accept the idea of change within themselves mentally, but then there is the question of communal acceptance. Among the many issues these people might face, financial instability is one of the big concerns.

Challenges Against Old Medical Myths, and Ignorance of Modern Medicine:

Dr Alka:

The presence of old myths and 'Jhada Phunk' (exorcism) is seen here in parallel with modern medicine. It is true that we see many cases of people spending money and sensitive time by going to the local practician who claims to be an expert in old traditional medicine and then coming to us when these alternative methods do not work. We do our best to inform them with facts and knowledge to protect them from scammers and other bad actors. We also see some people who come here to get medicine, at the same time, using 'Jhada Phunk' as well.

Conversation:

Vedi: "What can be done to increase awareness about the effectiveness of modern medicine?"

Dr Alka: "There are awareness campaigns for adolescent vaccination in schools. Schools play the role of important centres for providing vaccinations and other health concerns. By educating young school students, we help improve the issue of ignorance. Also, at the end of the day, faith in the medical system increases through positive and effective experiences."

Communal Mindset Around Women Working Jobs Outside of their Homes:

Dr Alka:

The degree of acceptance varies from family to family; some might be more open and supportive, willing to let their child go out and learn for their development, while others might stay very rigid and conservative in their ways.

Conversation:

Vedi: "What are the gender dynamics you see here regarding freedom of movement?"

Harsh: "Or regarding their future ambitions?"

Dr Alka: "Here, as it is in NCR, the restrictions put on girls from going out are not as intense as in some rural areas, and I feel the females are now mentally opening up; they are becoming more aware and have that craving of going out into the world to learn and empower themselves. When it comes to future ambitions, adolescents seem to be chasing higher living standards, which is helping build determination and motivating them to work towards their set goals."

Medical Issues Faced by the Adolescents:

Dr Alka:

We see more adolescent girls than boys coming to the clinic. The majority of girls' issues are related to menstrual problems. Boys might come if they have a bad fever or a dog bite, for example, but for nothing too common.

Programme to Help Adolescents with their Medical Issues:

Dr Alka:

Females are the main targeted group for this, as they mostly come to us, and we try to take care of such cases. The issue of anaemia and the lack of proper nutrition among younger and older teenagers is very common. We give iron formulation medicines to different age groups to help them fight iron deficiency and anaemia. They are also distributed at schools sometimes for individuals who cannot or are not allowed to make their way to the PHC here.

The Condition of Local Education and the Issue of Rising Substance Abuse in Adolescents:

Dr Alka:

It is a bit better than before, but still, the facilities here are not at all up to the level that could be desired. The Public Schools-to-population ratio is very large, forcing parents to either send their children to far away government schools, or in some cases the girls are made to drop out of school due to the parents being fearful and hesitant for their safety.

Conversation:

Vedi: "During our interviews with the elderly, parents, and even the front-line workers from a dispensary in Khoda, they mentioned the rising issue relating to substance abuse in growing adolescents. Have you dealt with or witnessed any such cases?"

Dr Alka: "There might be many such cases out there, but I cannot speak on them as I have personally not witnessed any such cases here. The population that reaches us does not seem to be involved in any such activities. I myself am an outsider, so I do not know much about the community here. I only get to know about things that make their way here when someone from my staff informs me about it."

Hygiene and Water Sanitation:

Dr Alka:

The overall cleanliness and people's attitude towards hygiene have improved a lot, but there is much more room for improvement when it comes to water sanitation and garbage management. Initially, there used to be issues relating to waterlogging, where during rainy days I could not even make it to my PHC here, but things have changed a bit. You people might be familiar with the pulse polio programmes, where workers had to face knee-deep waters to reach remote areas, and having to fill documents in candlelight without electricity. Since then, the community situation has improved a lot, including the infrastructural condition. But more work is still required.

The Condition of Violence Towards Women:

Conversation:

Vedi: "What is the situation with violence against women? Are there major cases of domestic violence here?"

Dr Alka: "Thankfully, there are not many cases originating from middle-class families now, but there are still some socially and economically lacking sections of society here where women still face violence at home because of feuds relating to finances or alcoholism, to name a few reasons."

Vedi: "Is there anything that can be done for women currently going through such conditions?"

Dr Alka: "There have been some women who have reached out to us regarding these concerns, and to help them, we have tried our best to provide them with short-term volunteering opportunities while also focusing on empowering them with their individualities and enough knowledge about the government schemes."

Community's Expected Response on Non-Traditional Livelihoods for Men and Women:

Dr Alka:

From what I have experienced and seen, even though some people are very conservative in their ways and views and are not willing to participate, the immense strength of the diverse community will surely result in some success. A diverse community fosters a strong sense of community. After some measurable success, the motivation and strength of the community would steamroll into even bigger success stories, motivating even more and still more people.

ANMs and ASHA Workers and their Link with the Community:

Dr Alka:

Our ANMs and ASHA workers are the link between us and the community; they play the role of information carriers between us. Also, as they work daily door-to-door, they are well known in all the localities and are trusted by them. The ANMs and ASHA workers can be the greatest asset here. They know the area where they operate very well. They understand the background, attitude, motivations, and other community issues that everyone faces in more detail than anyone else. They are also seen by the community as people who work for the betterment of the community itself; they are trusted. Through them, one could raise enough awareness among the target demographic regarding new programmes and initiatives that can benefit adolescents. However, the ultimate issue of lack of overall public participation can be a major roadblock when it comes to the effective implementation of new initiatives.

The Fight During COVID:
Conversation:

Vedi: "How was the condition during COVID? Was it a complete shutdown, or was this PHC still operating?"

Dr Alka: "During COVID, we were still operating, doing house-to-house surveys to measure the spread of the COVID-19 infection. The PHC was never closed; it continued running at a decreased capacity. This PHC also became the first vaccination centre here in Khoda, and so, we had to cater to a very huge area. During vaccination, we used to have very long lines of people waiting to get their vaccines. It was a hectic time."

The Cure for Lack of Participation:

Dr Alka:

One of the reasons might be the lack of availability of time. People seem very busy with their own lives and their goals; they do not give any time to think about their development in other areas. They need a strong incentive and motivation to separate even a little bit of their time from their daily lives. For example, this PHC runs every Sunday as well to provide an opportunity to working people who cannot find time from their workweek for medical attention.

Suggestions in Context of the Current Situation:

Dr Alka:

One of the main focuses should be on raising awareness and the degree of education. Many times, I have experienced that there is less friction when working with educated people. A focus should also be on the elderly population; their living conditions are not very great. Also, we should encourage Nagar Nigam to do more work; they have such a quantity of manpower, funding, and all other important resources that are required for change. They have been working quite hard; hence, we see a small amount of change around us, but they need to be motivated to take more initiative.

Reflective Voice

The interview with Dr Alka provides a multifaceted view of the health and social challenges faced by the community in Khoda. Her insights reveal a community at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, grappling with conservative mindsets, persistent medical myths, and gender dynamics that limit the potential of many individuals, especially adolescent women.

Despite these challenges, there are glimmers of progress. Educational campaigns, especially in schools, are slowly creating a greater acceptance of modern medicine. The increased mental

openness among women and adolescents towards self-empowerment and higher living standards is a positive trend. Yet, issues like menstrual health problems among adolescent girls, inadequate local education facilities, and the threat of substance abuse highlight the urgent need for more comprehensive interventions.

The role of ANMs and ASHA workers is crucial in bridging the gap between the PHC and the community. Their trusted presence and deep understanding of local issues make them invaluable assets in implementing health programmes and raising awareness.

While Khoda faces many social and health issues, Dr. Alka's interview highlights the potential for positive change through continued education, community engagement, and empowered female participation. By leveraging local resources and prioritising the well-being of all residents, Khoda can build a healthier and more inclusive future.

Conclusion:

Dr Alka's reflections emphasise the need for continued education, awareness campaigns, and community engagement to overcome these hurdles. Enhancing public participation, leveraging the resources of Nagar Nigam more effectively, and focusing on the welfare of both the youth and the elderly are key steps towards creating a healthier, more inclusive community in Khoda. The journey is challenging, but with sustained effort and collective action, there is hope for

The PHC Khoda entrance

Dr. Alka's examination room

significant progress.

Stakeholder 5: Magic Bus Foundation, 15th May 2024

Transcript Report

Magic Bus India Foundation is one of the top five NGOs in the education and skilling space in India. Founded in Mumbai in 1999, they have grown into an organisation with a pan-India presence. On 15th May, there was an interview session with Mr Mukesh Yadav, from the Magic Bus Khoda initiative, where he shared the insights of his working experiences.

Magic Bus Initiatives and Objectives:

Mukesh Yadav:

Magic Bus works with young people living in poverty, taking them from a childhood full of challenges to a life with meaningful livelihoods. We work with young people's ecosystems (parents, peers, community, and local institutions) to create a network of support for young adults.

Magic Bus has been working in the livelihood sector for 6-7 years at this point.

It also has another branch that works with the adolescent age group between 13 and 17, which works within communities as well as schools, introducing and training different life skills in children.

The livelihood department works with people who are ages 18 and above to train them with skills and provide them with employment opportunities so that they can become independent.

Training Process:

Mukesh Yadav:

Youth Identification and Mobilization Process

The process first starts with the 'Youth Identification' process, where we scope out people from the age groups 18–25 who are looking for proper placement support.

After this follows the 'Mobilisation' process, which involves door-to-door attempts at scoping potential participants. We also collaborate with the branch that works with children, as they are more involved in communities at the local level. We also do field trips and e-rickshaw announcements.

Pre-coaching Sessions

The next step after identification and mobilization is the 'Pre-coaching Sessions', which are very important to make sure of all the background details such as age, address, identity, etc.

With 35 eligible members, we first launch the course for 7 days to assess the participant's behaviour and seriousness.

3. Selection for 2-Month Course

After the 7 days, 25–30 participants are chosen for the 2-month-long course.

Ensuring Employment:

Mukesh Yadav:

1. Parallel Identification of Potential Employers

Potential employers are identified parallel to the training process, with a signed contract to ensure job opportunities for the participants.

The employers are given the authority and the opportunity to provide any special expertise that they might require for their future employees.

Targeted Placement:

The target is always to place 60% of the participants with one of the two already-selected employers.

As the Magic Bus's funding sources are employment-focused, ensuring placement and 6-month insurance of employment is very important for us to keep operating.

Training Content and Structure:

Mukesh Yadav:

1. Two-Month Training

The two-month training process, with roughly 45 working days, focuses on professional skills like spoken English, basic IT knowledge, and also life skills related to the workplace.

Class Schedules

We schedule online classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays to familiarise the participants with technology and modern requirements for their jobs.

For the rest of the days, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, classes are held here at the centre.

Hiring Process:

Mukesh Yadav:

1. Post-Training Interviews

After the training, sets of interviews are scheduled with the selected employers for job offerings.

2. Open Market Employment

In case we fail to fulfil our 60% target of the participants being placed with the pre-selected employers, we have to get permission from higher authority within Magic Bus to then try to employ the rest of the participants within the open market.

Course and Employment Flexibility:

Mukesh Yadav:

Monthly Follow-Ups:

We track their progress four times within the first month, after which they are followed up every month to make sure they are still working.

Flexibility to Change Employers:

If better opportunities open up, participants can switch employers.

Trainers:

Mukesh Yadav:

Role of Trainers:

One trainer has to oversee the entire training process—mobilisation, training, employment, and following up with the trainers during their time of employment.

Changing Trainers:

The trainers change according to the demands of the students and courses.

Challenges in Khoda:

Mukesh Yadav:

Gender Biases:

Khoda is our largest community in Asia, and it plays host to numerous NGOs, which end up dividing the targeted audience.

Magic Bus is bound to maintain 50% female participants in all the courses, but the ratio between boys and girls falls heavily towards male participation. Girls face social and familial restrictions that hinder their participation.

Broader Participation Issues:

People usually gravitate towards opportunities outside Khoda. Issues of religion's orthodox mentality, restricts women's power and employment opportunities.

Parental Involvement:

Mukesh Yadav:

Parent Counseling:

There is a scheduled parent counselling meeting to make sure that the parents are willing to let their children work.

Policies on Dropouts:

Magic Bus has very harsh policies against course dropouts. A breathing space of 5% for dropouts is allowed only for valid reasons.

Success Stories:

Mukesh Yadav:

A participant from batch 5, Akansha, joined one of our pre-fixed employers after her training, got promoted soon to HR, and is now working on the hiring process.

Also, 3 participants are now working as floor managers in Zudio.

Reflective Voice

Magic Bus's approach to training and employment is systematic and well-structured, ensuring that participants are not only equipped with relevant skills but also provided with tangible job opportunities. The multi-faceted engagement strategy during the mobilisation process, including door-to-door outreach and community involvement, highlights the organisation's commitment to reaching the most marginalised individuals.

The organisation's efforts to secure employment for participants through pre-identified employers, along with the flexibility for participants to change jobs if better opportunities arise,

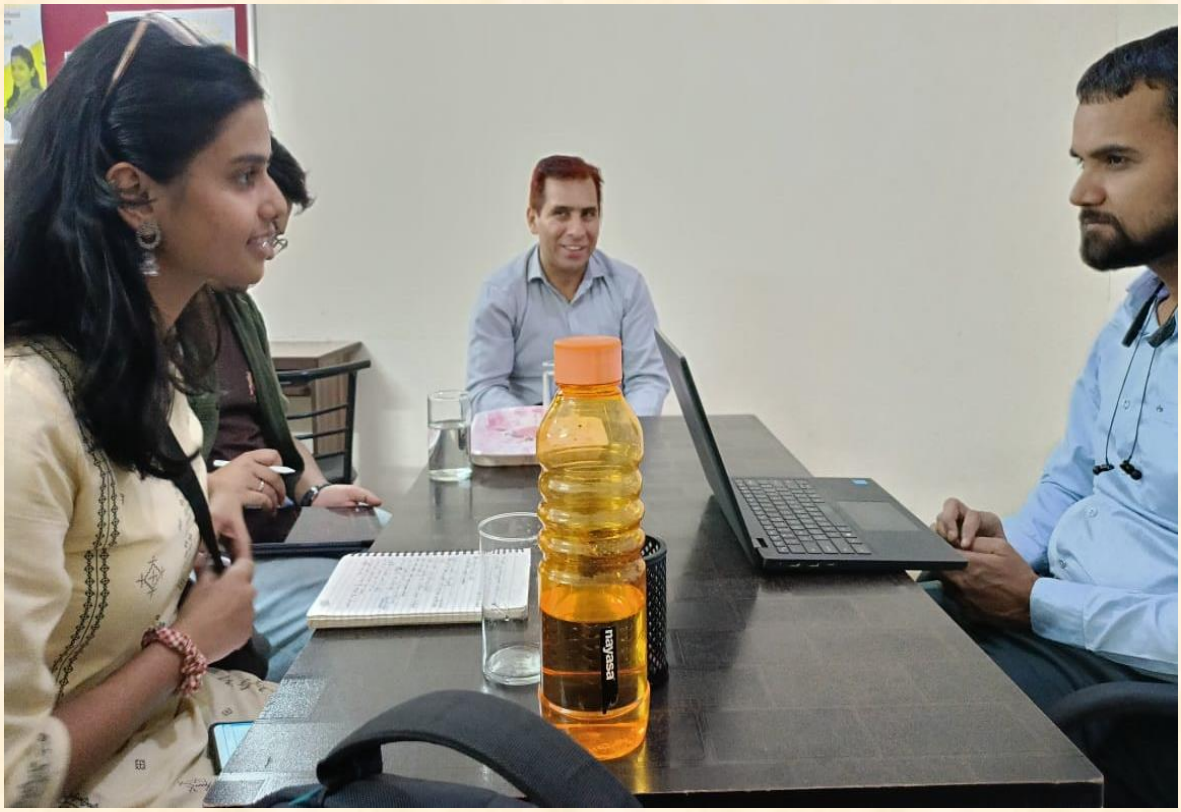
indicate a responsive and adaptive strategy. The monthly follow-ups demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring sustained employment, which is vital for the long-term success of the participants.

However, the persistent gender biases and social restrictions in communities like Khoda present significant challenges. Magic Bus's strict policies on maintaining female participation and addressing dropout rates are not only necessary but highlight the broader societal changes needed to fully support gender equality and inclusive participation.

Conclusion

Magic Bus has developed a robust framework for empowering young people living in poverty through professional training and employment opportunities. The organisation's comprehensive training programmes, strategic employer partnerships, and supportive follow-up mechanisms ensure that participants are well-prepared for the job market and can sustain their employment.

Despite the significant progress, challenges such as gender biases and social restrictions remain. Addressing these issues requires continued efforts from Magic Bus, alongside broader societal changes. Success stories like Akansha's promotion to HR and participants becoming floor managers at Zudio exemplify the potential impact of Magic Bus's initiatives.



Mr. Mukesh Yadav and CFAR's team at Magic Bus training centre, Khoda Colony

Stakeholder 6: People Involved in Non-Traditional Livelihoods, 25th May 2024

(Interviews with two Female E-Rikshaw Drivers)

Transcript Report

Participant 1

The interview with Vidya, a female e-rikshaw driver, conducted on 20th May, explores her journey, experiences, and aspirations. Vidya's story reflects the intersection of gender, economic necessity, and resilience, offering insights into the lives of women breaking into male-dominated professions.

Personal Background:

Vidya: My name is Vidya. I am an e-rikshaw driver. I'm around 40 or 42 years old, maybe older, I don't know.

Vedi: Don't you have an Aadhar card or any document mentioning your age?

Vidya: It's there, but I don't remember. I don't even remember when were my kids born. The kids themselves are aware, they are literate. I have 5 kids, all boys. My husband is a victim of a car accident from 6 years ago. So, he has short-term memory loss. He stays on medication all-round the year, and even now, without medication, he forgets his past 15 days. Because of this he is unable to work.

Previous Work:

Vidya:

I used to work, initially stitching clothes. I then opened a sanitary napkin-making unit. We were 8 people working together, but after the lockdown everyone left and the unit was closed down. If it wasn't for COVID we all might still have been working on the same thing.

Association with CFAR:

Vidya:

I used to stay at home. Then one day some madams came to conduct a survey related to health and hygiene through their WASH Project in Okhla. After that, I started connecting more and more with them to try to contribute to the community work they were doing, and I was enjoying it. At that time, I also joined an SHG. The name of the SHG was Ravidas SHG. During

the lockdown we worked a lot, distributing rations from home-to-home within the community. We were determined to leave no one hungry and tried our best to achieve that.

Transition to E-Rikshaw Driving:

Vidya:

After COVID, I learnt about e-rickshaw driving through the AASTHA organisation which works near my house. With their help I joined a driving course and the training process happened in Sarai Kale Khan for about a year.

Family Reaction:

Vidya:

My kids did not let me fill out the form at first. But I wanted to learn how to drive and work. Eventually, my eldest son agreed and told me to try it out.

Even after I joined, initially I had to manage the entire household chores all on my own, from ironing clothes to hand-washing them, preparing all kinds of meals, groceries and everything.

But now there have been positive changes at home. The kids help me in the morning if I am getting late for the job. They have become more self-reliant and independent. Also, now my youngest kid cooks dinner every day to help offload some of my work. Earlier, he did not know how to cook at all, but he has learnt it all on his own. He also sometimes helps with house cleaning and other stuff. My kids support me entirely.

Earning, Working Conditions and Leaves:

Vidya:

I earn somewhere around 25-30 thousand a month. But it is quite hard work as I wake up at 5 in the morning to finish the housework, which includes laundry, cooking, cleaning, etc. before I leave for work, and then it's a very busy day till I go to bed around 10 or 11 at night.

For the job, there is no fixed reporting time, it is quite flexible. I can start anytime between 8 to 10 a.m., but I usually aim at getting to Kalkaji to start driving by 8 a.m.

We officially get 4 leaves every month, but that does affect our base pay. If you do not take any leave, you get paid 17 thousand as base pay, but if you do take the 4 days off a month, your base pay decreases to 15 thousand.

We can drive for as long as we want, but we have to pay a type of e-rikshaw rent of around 850 every day. Earlier it used to be 500 rupees per day, but it was increased recently.

Challenges:

Vidya:

There indeed are many challenges. The harsh weather and balancing housework and professional life, but my kids have made that a bit easier now.

Sometimes there are rash drivers on the road. Just a few days ago I had an accident. I always drive cautiously at a safe speed and pay very serious attention to all laws and rules. But this accident happened when a motorbike suddenly stopped in front of me, and I did not have much time to react, and my e-rikshaw slammed into the bike. Even though my vehicle was at a speed of just 20-25 km/h, the entire front glass got shattered and I injured my hand. For this accident, the company deducted 6.5 thousand rupees from my monthly salary to pay towards the fixing of the broken glass. I never had even a scratch on my vehicle before this recent accident.

In the beginning other male auto drivers were a bit irritated, saying that we started to drive e-rikshaws to take away from their earnings. But other than that, people seem happy to see us driving.

Gender-Based Experiences:

Vidya:

The reality is that there is a mixture of people with different natures, so I partially cover my face to protect myself from inquisitive male eyes. I also do it to not get recognised by the people from my neighbourhood, and also to protect myself from the weather. Now it has become such a habit that it feels weird to even remove it when I am at home.

By and large, the male auto drivers resent us driving autos. On the other hand, people generally appear to be happy to see us driving. Many people take photos with us, even people from outside India coming here as tourists, and I enjoy their enthusiasm too. Sometimes, people even skip other autos if they see ours waiting in line; it is a novelty for them to sit in an auto driven by a female driver.

Future Aspirations:

Vidya:

I am satisfied with this job right now but if another job pays better, then I might want to switch. I also want to learn how to drive a car, for which, I have joined a training batch. The training has not started yet, but I am very eager to learn car driving and then start driving cabs instead of e-rikshaws.

Reflective Voice

Vidya's story is a powerful testament to resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. Her transition from traditional household roles and informal work to a non-traditional job as an e-rickshaw driver underscores the significant economic pressures and gender norms she navigates daily. This shift highlights the importance of community support and empowerment initiatives like those provided by CFAR and AASTHA in enabling women to break into male-dominated professions.

Vidya's involvement in community work, particularly during the pandemic, demonstrates her commitment to collective well-being, which also seems to fuel her drive. Her participation in an SHG and distribution of rations during the lockdown indicates a strong sense of social responsibility and leadership.

The challenges Vidya faces, such as balancing work with household duties and dealing with workplace accidents, reflect broader systemic issues that many women in similar non-traditional roles encounter. The lack of fair treatment in incidents like her salary deduction post-accident indicates a need for better support systems and policies to protect women in the workforce

Vidya's future aspirations to learn car driving and possibly switch to cab driving suggest a proactive approach to improving her economic situation. It also reflects her desire for continuous personal and professional development, which is essential for long-term empowerment and stability.

Conclusion

A journey from a clothes stitcher and sanitary napkin unit operator to an e-rickshaw driver encapsulates the struggles and triumphs of women venturing into non-traditional livelihoods. Vidya’s story, marked by resilience, community engagement, and a relentless pursuit of better opportunities, highlights the transformative impact of empowerment initiatives and the crucial role of family support in engaging in non-traditional livelihoods. Vidya's experiences underline the need for improved support structures for women in the workforce, particularly in non-traditional roles, to ensure fair treatment and sustained empowerment. As she looks to the future, Vidya embodies the potential for growth and change, inspiring others in similar circumstances to pursue their aspirations despite societal and economic challenges.

Vidya, on the driving seat of her e-rikshaw, speaking to the CFAR team

Participant 2

On 20th May, we conducted an interview with Jyoti Rani, a 21-year-old female e-rikshaw driver near the Kalkaji Metro station. This narrative explores Jyoti's background, her path to e-rickshaw driving, the challenges she faced, and her future aspirations.

Personal Background:

Jyoti:

My name is Jyoti Rani, and I am 21 years old.

My husband does not work, he is a drunkard and has Tuberculosis. We have two small children, both daughters; one is 8 years old and the other 5 years old.

Transition to E-Rikshaw Driving:

Jyoti:

There is an NGO here named Sambhawana, who told us about the programme for lady auto drivers. In the beginning, all were hesitant about how they would be able to drive, but I persevered as I had been looking for an opportunity to find work because of my family condition; I had two girls to take care of.

During the meetings held to scope out willing women who wanted to learn, I was among the first ones to raise their hands to join the programme. I first learnt with 2-3 other people from our locality, after which, when we started driving, it inspired other women to join as well.

The 15 days long training programme was free of cost and used to held in the Sarai Kale Khan area.

Family Reaction:

Jyoti:

Initially, my family was not at all supportive, but eventually they had to come around on their own as my family needed money to be financially stable. It was difficult to even feed ourselves roti two times a day. If I was not going to work, then who would have given us the money? So, they started accepting it in the course of time.

I manage the entire housework as well as my job. My husband does not help with the house chores at all and my kids are too small right now to help.

In the morning my children go to school, after which their father picks them up, and they spend the rest of the day here at home.

Earnings and Working Conditions

Jyoti:

It has been about a year since I started driving the e-rikshaw. I would say, every day I earn around 500 rupees after paying the e-rickshaw rent, which usually comes to about 15 thousand rupees every month.

I usually wake up around 6 or 7 a.m., then I take care of all the housework, and after finishing, I go to work. The working hours here are flexible so it is not an issue if I reach late.

There are no direct medical facilities, but we have an ESI medical card through which we can get free medical care.

Right now, we are fighting for PFs. Recently, we drivers even had two days of strike for this cause.

We are permitted to drive all over Delhi. The furthest I have been to is the airport, Kamla Nagar market, and Anand Vihar, to name a few.

Challenges:

Jyoti:

There were plenty of challenges in the beginning, mainly on account of the male auto drivers criticising us for leaving our homes and driving autos which reduces their income. It was mostly just the standard sexist remarks, of how women must stay at home, in the kitchen, and other things like that. And if we used to make any mistake on the road, there were some who used to teach us, while many would make fun of us.

Also, there is a lot of shoulder pain as driving an auto requires constant attention on the handlebars.

During the monsoon season, we sometimes face issues as the vehicle stops working all of a sudden as the rain affects the battery. But whenever something like that happens, we call the company, and they send someone to tow the e-rikshaw.

Community and Social Changes:

Jyoti:

There has been a social change towards accepting women in non-traditional workplaces.

In the beginning, we were less in numbers, just 2-3 drivers, but today we have grown to a strength of around 40 e-rickshaw drivers here at Kalkaji itself.

Before there were many situations where already established male drivers used to argue with us due to us taking the passengers, and some even resulted in fights which escalated to us being taken to the police stations, but now we understand the rules and people around us have also been sympathetic.

Future Aspirations:

Jyoti:

Right now, I am on a contract for 3 years, so I cannot change my job. But I am learning to drive a car, so maybe after finishing this contract, I will get into cab driving.

Initially, I wanted to enter the Delhi Police Service, but I could not continue my studies after 10th class as I got married. My in-laws' family has never been supportive of my efforts and I did not have my parents to support me either, so I have been supporting myself the best I could this whole while.

Message to Others:

Jyoti:

To anyone in a similar condition as mine, I just want to tell them to keep their mentality strong because there are many people around us constantly trying to drag us down and demoralise us, but we must stay strong.

Reflective Voice

Jyoti's story is a testament to the power of resilience in overcoming systemic barriers. Her journey from a struggling housewife to a professional e-rickshaw driver underscores the significant social and economic challenges faced by women in India. Support from NGOs like Sambhawana is crucial in providing women with the skills and confidence needed to enter non-traditional professions. Jyoti's ability to balance household responsibilities with her job demonstrates the dual burden many working women bear. Her experience also highlights the importance of solidarity among female workers in advocating for their rights, as seen in their recent strike for PF benefits.

Conclusion

Jyoti Rani's narrative is one of courage and determination. Despite facing significant personal and societal challenges, she has carved out a space for herself in a male-dominated field, providing for her family and inspiring other women to do the same. Her future aspirations to become a cab driver and her message of resilience offer hope and encouragement to many women facing similar circumstances. Jyoti's story not only reflects her journey but also signals a broader shift towards gender equality and women's empowerment in India.

Literature Review – Models on Non-Traditional Livelihoods Including Personal Insights from Practitioners

MODEL 1

AZAD FROM LABELS

Introduction

Jaidev, a second-year student of the University of Delhi, commented on his friend Priti's car parking skills as they reached their destination to receive their society event's Chief Guest's comment, "Priti you drive quite well for a woman".

The label of "women as bad drivers" has hitherto restricted a woman's freedom of movement and limited her mindset for aspiring to become anything non-conventional. The projection of women as unsafe drivers by different forms of media has propagated this stereotype over time, giving a sense of power and control to the misogynistic portion of society as it makes the woman dependent on other members of the family for any movement outside their traditionally assigned societal roles.

Azad Foundation and Sakha Cab's initiative

Azad Foundation is working on breaking this century-old stigma with its sister organization, Sakha Cabs by empowering and training women to become independent, skilled, and confident drivers in a traditionally male-dominated field.

Since its inception in 2008, the Azad Foundation has been providing frontline opportunities and training to women in marginalised communities in urban areas. Through its 'Women on Wheels' training programme to empower the Sakha Cabs initiative, the Azad Foundation hopes to dissipate some of the persistent gender inequalities in Indian society while providing effective non-traditional livelihood options for young women, mostly aged 18-35, living in slums and resettlement colonies in cities with meagre economic capital, with a high scope of self-development and proper returns to enable them to become financially strong and independent.

The Foundation, which started by training just nine women into professional drivers in its first year, has, in the following decade, effectively trained over 850 individuals into professionally employable drivers across its operating cities of Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, and Indore, providing 24x7 cab services to and from airports, railway stations, and bus stops, besides other destinations within the city. Their efforts have been recognised across the country as well as the globe by many national and international news outlets.

The Context

To quote Jayawati Shrivastava, a lady driver, from stories of women behind the wheel, "Driving—a bullock cart, a truck, a car or anything else—has largely been a male activity. A driver is one who leads, and in a patriarchal society, it is the man who is considered capable of this and indeed 'driving' the lives of those around him. Women and children are meant to follow."

The initiative of Sakha Cabs operates within the context of entrenched gender stereotypes and societal norms that confine women's roles, increasing their dependency on the male members of the family.

By providing access to non-traditional employment opportunities, the initiative gives these women from marginalised communities, a kickstart to be in the driving seat of both, their personal and professional lives.

Sakha Cabs empowers women by offering them a chance to earn independently, develop valuable skills, and challenge traditional gender roles, leading to increased confidence for women, a shift in family dynamics, and a more normal view of women in non-traditional professions within society as a whole. Addressing the gender disparity in the male-dominated field of professional driving, 'Women on Wheels' seeks to challenge and change traditional norms, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for young women who aspire to thrive in their professional lives.

Women on Wheels Training Programme

When we introduced the 'Women on Wheels' initiative as a topic of group discussion among the sophomores of Deshbandhu College, we received mixed reactions to the cause but one point that was unanimously shared by all was the concerns regarding the structure of the training programme.

The journey of a trainee at Sakha Cabs starts with a systemised training programme which aims at the holistic growth of these women with the final aim of developing confident professional drivers with a sense of individuality. The training programme consists of technical driver's training, along with other life skills training.

The entire process of training is divided into 3 modules:

(i) The first is the technical module, where the trainee is introduced to the technical part of driving and other technicalities of cars as well. The focus is on training women to become efficient drivers while also having sufficient knowledge about traffic regulations, road networks, and road signs. The trainees go through months-long driving training while also learning about proper maintenance as well as route and map identifications.

(ii) Next is the self-development module, primarily focusing on the personal development of these women to help them evolve beyond the constraints created by society. Involving the components of communication and language training helps create the effect of change in the trainee's interpersonal skills and personality by improving their self-confidence and effectiveness in tackling any situation.

(iii) The third module is focused on women's empowerment, which helps improve trainees' attitudes towards gender discrimination, which has been normalised by society. The trainee also learns insights on women's sexual and reproductive health, their legal rights regarding dowry laws, sexual harassment at workplace laws, the difference between official laws and customs or traditions, self-defence, etc.

The Barriers:

Limited Awareness and Education: Low levels of awareness and education, especially among marginalised communities, pose a crucial barrier to participation. Providing education and awareness-raising initiatives alongside empowerment programmes becomes a necessity to ensure equitable access and participation.

Social Norms and Cultural Resistance: Deep-rooted gender norms and traditional beliefs are significant challenges. Resistance from conservative communities and individuals who oppose women's empowerment and participation in traditionally male-dominated roles often hinders the acceptance and success of the programme in the localities of these big cities.

Safety and Security Concerns: Ensuring the safety and security of women trainees and drivers, particularly in high-crime areas like Delhi and NCR or during late-night shifts, is crucial but equally challenging.

Geographical and Logistical Challenges: Operating in diverse geographical areas with varying infrastructural and logistical challenges present continuous obstacles. Notwithstanding, Sakha Cabs has managed to overcome this initial obstacle and is now thriving and expanding into different cities.

Impact and Opportunities

Many trainees have dropped out of formal education before completing Class 12, hence their employment choices are limited. 'Women on Wheels' is an initiative that helps empower these women trainees with career opportunities, which manifests into a complete sense of independence and individuality.

Azad Foundation's motto, "For Women, By Women", aptly demonstrates the role and need of their Sakha Cabs initiative. In high gender-related crime rate cities, the Foundation not only empowers women from resource-poor backgrounds by presenting better-paying economic opportunities, it also fulfils the transportation needs of middle- and upper-class professional women, ensuring their safety.

The 'Women on Wheels' initiative trains and develops women as effective and independent human resources for their personal and family development as well as the economic growth of the country by creating employment and revenue through which the Sakha Cabs programme helps move women from the margins to the mainstream economy.

Breaking barriers in Delhi, Geeta, a 26-year-old with a talent for driving, became the first woman driver for USAID along with two others. Her skills were honed over five years at Sakha Cabs, where she eventually trained new drivers at Azad. Now, she's a role model, paving the way for more women in the field (sakhaconsultingwings.com).

Learnings:

Utilising Untapped Potential: Recognising and harnessing the untapped potential of the women workforce from marginalised communities can lead to innovative solutions that benefit both individuals and society as a whole.

Comprehensive Training (Holistic Approach): The 'Women on Wheels' programme doesn't just focus on technical skills but also emphasises on personal development and empowerment. This holistic approach ensures that trainees not only learn to drive but also gain confidence, communication skills, and knowledge about their rights, fostering their overall growth and empowerment.

Challenging Orthodoxical Norms (Community Impact): Azad Foundation's initiative helps us to foresee a different perspective to approach deeply-rooted stereotypes about women's abilities, particularly in male-dominated fields like driving. By providing training and opportunities, they demonstrate that women can excel in traditionally male roles, debunking harmful stereotypes.

Addressing Socio-economic Disparities: The initiative targets women from marginalised communities, with low-income or disadvantaged backgrounds, by providing them with

opportunities for better livelihoods. By offering employment in a field with high demand, tailoring programmes to address their unique needs and challenges can lead to more impactful outcomes. Sakha Cabs helps address socio-economic disparities and provides a pathway to financial independence for women who may have limited options otherwise.

Scalability and Sustainability: Starting with a small number of trainees, Azad Foundation has successfully scaled up its operations over the years, training hundreds of women and expanding its services to multiple cities. This demonstrates the scalability and sustainability of their model, which can be replicated in other contexts to empower more women and address similar challenges.

Recognition and Advocacy: Seeking recognition and advocacy for women's empowerment initiatives at both the national and international levels, and highlighting success stories and advocating for policy changes, can help garner support and resources for scaling up efforts and addressing systemic barriers to gender equality.

Reflective Voice

We happened to introduce this model to the sophomores of Deshbandhu College in a group discussion, and the responses we got were varied. Though everyone unanimously appreciated the cause and ideation of this initiative, yet there were comically toned remarks like “Will these women be able to perform without accidents?” or “The only thing a woman can drive is a person crazy”.

When asked whether they will ride a women-driven vehicle, Rishika commented: “I would anytime prefer to sit in a vehicle driven by a female. If you remember the Pink Auto initiative for safety purposes, I used to think that ladies were to drive the Pink Auto. I was disappointed to find it otherwise.”

The students’ primary concern as mentioned before was about the training structure, and not the capability of a woman. They believe that such initiatives should be encouraged. “Perhaps if I safely reach my destination in a Sakha Cab vehicle, it will automatically change the perception. And more change of perceptions like these will help in establishing neutrality in the gender discrepancy ratio in this profession.” says Priyanshu.

MODEL 2

HANDY WOMEN

Introduction

From everyday experience, when hoping to secure a handyman, an electrician, a plumber, or a carpenter, we always have come to expect a man for the job, but we never stop to consider the possibility of women being capable of carrying out such tasks. By breaking down these stereotypes and biases, we can create more opportunities for women in these industries and promote gender equality in the workforce.

Based in the city of Pune, Jhilmil Electronics and Ashtavinayak Mahila Bachat Gat, supported by CYDA, have set their efforts in motion to fight against such gender stereotypes and discrimination. Both organisations have been actively recruiting and training women in various skilled trades. By providing these women with the necessary skills and support, they are breaking barriers and proving that gender should not determine one's abilities in any profession.

Initiative

The Centre for Youth Development and Activities (CYDA) is a voluntary organization established in the year 1999. The primary focus of CYDA's work is on young people between the ages of 13 and 29. Their mission is to empower these young individuals and, in turn, contribute to improving the lives of marginalised communities. They adopt a rights-based development approach, believing that youth can be powerful agents of social change and transformation when mobilised and channeled effectively (cydaindia.org).

CYDA's work spans various areas, including gender equity, human rights, plurality, participation, accountability, and transparency. Through initiatives like bridging learning gaps, promoting STEM education, and supporting marginalised communities during the pandemic, CYDA strives to make a positive impact on society (svpindia.org).

Through their non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme, CYDA encourages women to pursue livelihood opportunities that break traditional norms, providing economic stability and empowering women psychologically, socially, and politically. CYDA aims to create lasting change in the lives of these young women.

Context

Jhilmil Electronics and Ashtavinayak Mahila Bachat Gat, micro-enterprises created and fully owned by women, are LED light manufacturers working on training women from underprivileged backgrounds into skilled sets of technicians. These women were mainly homemakers, with some also balancing domestic helper jobs, with a strong desire to step outside of the expectations set for them. They have challenged and shattered traditional gender roles, paving the way for other women to defy boundaries and constraints.

Developing Working Women into Skilled Technicians and Future Entrepreneurs

From what started as the first six women completing the training course, learning while also fighting familial and societal pressures, these skilled women began looking into careers as electricians and appliance repair mechanics. But with zero initial positive results due to multiple reasons, including lack of opportunities in the repair market as well as non-acceptance into the profession of electricians and mechanics, CYDA proposed the idea of manufacturing and selling LED lights to them. Drawing inspiration from this concept, the ladies established their own business by banding together to form Jhilmil Electronics, and began producing LED light bulbs.

For their model focused on empowering women, CYDA, the coalition partner, had introduced the electrician's course for women to acquire essential knowledge and skills as part of its non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme. The thoughtfully designed course introduces the trainees to practical experiences, to teach them about LED light manufacturing and the repair of other electrical appliances. The technical portion of the course was facilitated in association with the Tech Mahindra Smart Centre in Pune.

The programme equips the women with not just the technical skills to assemble the LEDs; they are also given hands-on experience in navigating wholesale markets for raw materials, fostering their independence in sourcing supplies. The women are also encouraged to take ownership of their venture by creating business plans, brainstorming promotional strategies, and calculating costs and profits on their own. This complete holistic approach helps empower them to become more than just assemblers, but full-fledged entrepreneurs.

Jhilmil Electronics has already established a standard for other women to follow. Nine ladies from Nagpur Chawl who were trained by women from Jhilmil Electronics, following their inspiration, attempted to explore this idea for themselves, and they too set off on the journey of development and independence. The group joined together to form Ashtavinayak Mahila Bachat Gat.

Learning from Jhilmil Electronics' experience, Ashtavinayak Mahila Bachat Gat aimed to maximise profits and exposure. They worked hard to secure cheaper options of raw materials sourced from other states as well as find a place for them to set up their workshop for producing and assembling LED lights.

The Barriers:

Structural Challenges: The COVID-19 epidemic compounded some structural issues. Women were disproportionately affected by a lack of access to skill-building opportunities and productive work. Ashtavinayak Mahila Bachat Gat and Jhilmil Electronics worked hard to ensure that women, particularly those from resource-poor backgrounds, were less harmed by the pandemic.

Gender Salary Gap and Discrimination: Women often endure discrimination in salary and opportunities. Overcoming this barrier is critical to establishing gender equality. The non-traditional skills and livelihoods programmes seek to overcome these discrepancies and provide women with alternative career paths.

Non-Traditional Skills and Livelihoods: Both Jhilmil Electronics and Ashtavinayak Mahila Bachat Gat have faced personal and social challenges to providing livelihoods for women in non-traditional jobs. These barriers include gendered perceptions of skill, employment, and occupation. By challenging these prejudices, they hope to empower women from marginalised communities.

Patriarchal Mindset: Patriarchal mindsets frequently view girls as economic liabilities. This mentality promotes gender prejudice. CYDA fights this patriarchal attitude by promoting non-traditional skills and income opportunities for women.

Learnings:

Innovative Solution to Employment Challenges: In response to the initial lack of acceptance for women in traditional electrician and mechanic roles, the women pivoted to creating their own business in LED manufacturing. This innovative solution not only addressed the employment challenges faced by the women but also created a sustainable and profitable enterprise.

Empowerment through Ownership: Women involved in the initiative are not only trained in technical skills but are also allowed to run their own businesses. They are active in all aspects of the business, from material sourcing to business plan development, which fosters independence and self-reliance.

Resilience Amid Adversity: Despite overcoming personal and social hurdles such as patriarchal beliefs and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the women involved in the programme have

displayed exceptional perseverance and determination. Their capacity to overcome adversity is an encouragement to those experiencing similar challenges.

Replication of Success: The successful establishment of Ashtavinayak Mahila Bachat Gat, following the model of Jhilmil Electronics, demonstrates the scalability and replicability of the initiative. By sharing their experiences and knowledge, women are empowered to replicate the success of the original venture in their communities.

Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity: The programme works within the cultural context of the communities it serves, ensuring that interventions respect local norms and traditions. This cultural inclusion improves the initiative's ability to empower women and ensures its long-term viability.

Reflective Voice

The topic of women's employment and Jhilmil Electronics as an example of a non-traditional method of livelihood was discussed with adolescent boys and girls in Khoda, and it mostly generated responses in favour of women having the right to choose their livelihood and being able to contribute to family's income for financial stability.

As Inderjeet, a student in 11th grade put it, "It is important for women to pursue professions which most appeal to their interests and situation regardless of how society has divided labour between the genders. Women being independent by owning their small businesses have become inspiring figures for young girls and boys with the ambition of achieving their own independence"

Inderjeet also highlighted the concern for women's safety by adding, "Working women also need to make sure they have the power and knowledge for their well-being and safety. Many fields that are dominated by men are filled with them constantly having arguments and physical fights between themselves, for example, the handymen looking for work in this area often end up having arguments which may lead to physical fights. When working in such fields, women need to be aware and empowered with self-confidence and methods of self-defence for their safety."

Trainees are soldering the wire

Trainee is soldering the board penal within the group

MODEL 3

FUELING ASPIRATIONS

Introduction

Working in a physically intensive job, facing the harsh elements of external weather, and communicating with customers often rude or full of prejudice are some of the obstacles faced by women working at petrol pumps in the largest city of the state of Gujarat, Ahmedabad.

But these challenges are mere bumps on the road for women like Triguna Bhatvi, a mother of 2, who are setting examples for other women by successfully balancing their personal and professional lives. She shines as a motivating figure to look up to for other women chasing their passion.

Initiative

Saath Charitable Trust, an NGO based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, was founded in 1989. Their aim since their inception was to rejuvenate underprivileged slums and vulnerable neighbourhoods, transforming them into self-sustaining and developed communities, with a future vision for inclusive and empowered communities and individuals (saath.org).

Saath focuses on capacity building, technology-enabled monitoring, accountability, expansion, and innovative funding approaches. By working with communities, developing community leadership, and engaging stakeholders, Saath has empowered 1,12,597 marginalised individuals during 2020-2021 (Saath's Annual Report 2020-2021) and provided livelihoods to 72,809 youths and women during 2022-2023 (Saath's Annual Report 2022-2023).

Context

The Trust firmly believes in the effectiveness of practising non-traditional livelihoods for adolescent girls and women to create new opportunities and have control over skills, technology, markets, mobility, resources, and personal finance. Since its establishment, the Trust has put its focus on livelihoods, skill development, health and education, rights, urban governance, financial independence, rehabilitation, and resettlement, among many other community development initiatives.

Saath's Contribution to Empowering Women with 'Women@Work'

Women@Work, a programme run by the Saath Trust, has the aim to empower young women from slums and other underprivileged areas aged 18–25 by teaching and training them on non-traditional models of skills and livelihood. The programme helps create economic stability along with psychological and social empowerment of women by employing a change in gender narratives, increasing the interface where women step up, step out, and start considering occupations that the male members of the workforce traditionally take up.

'Women Petrol Pump Attendants' is one of many examples through which Women@Work has shown its real-world practicality and excellence. With India quickly becoming the fastest-growing economy in the world, society must develop its opinion regarding the distribution of labour based on gender. With new change and development, the pre-existing communal ideas and restraints need to be challenged and broken.

The Barriers:

The young women working long hours as petrol pump attendants face many questions; about their ability to work for many long hours standing without exhaustion, about their being able to handle rude customers, or even questions regarding their safety. The 158 women who were trained for the job by this programme have answered all the questions not through words but through their hard work and dedication.

Safety Concerns: Working at a petrol station requires handling combustible liquids, which can be hazardous. Women may feel vulnerable during late-night shifts or when working alone, especially if the petrol station is located in a remote area.

Physical Demands: Pump attendants face physical demands such as lifting heavy fuel hoses and checking oil levels. Some women who were not accustomed to such roles, initially struggled to satisfy these physical requirements, resulting in exhaustion and pain.

Wage Disparities and Lack of Growth Opportunities: Women working at petrol stations typically earn less than their male counterparts. The gender pay-gap results in hurting women's financial stability and motivation to continue in these roles. Women in this sector may also face difficulties in advancing their careers due to a lack of advanced positions and other female role models.

Social Stigma: Women working at petrol pumps may face social stigma due to societal perceptions of unconventionality. Overcoming this stigma demands perseverance and determination.

Learnings:

Inspiring Role Models: Successful women like Triguna Bhatvi serve as inspiring role models for others, demonstrating that with determination and support, women can overcome barriers and achieve success in any field.

The Fight Against Gender Bias: The persistence of cultural bias against women in non-traditional roles and methods of livelihood, such as petrol pump attendants, highlights the need to challenge and break-down gender stereotypes. The initiative challenges traditional gender norms by empowering women to pursue non-traditional livelihoods, thereby promoting gender equality and diversity in the workforce.

Empowerment through Non-traditional Livelihoods: Programmes like Women@Work empower women by providing training in non-traditional skills and occupations, enabling economic stability and social empowerment, to support themselves and their families.

Community Development Initiatives: NGOs like Saath Charitable Trust play a crucial role in community development by focusing on livelihoods, skill development, health, education, and rights. Their initiatives have helped more than twenty-thousand children with education, seventy-two thousand eight hundred individuals with employment opportunities, and more than three lakh people with proper healthcare within the year 2022-2023 (Saath's Annual Report 2022-2023).

Skill Development: Women participating in the programme gain valuable skills and training in various fields, enhancing their employability and opening doors to new career opportunities.

The women employed at the petrol pumps, like Shell, HP, and BCCL, to name a few prominent ones, have shown that they are just as skilled and capable as their male counterparts, dispelling any doubts about their ability to handle the job physically or mentally. Their dedication and

perseverance serve as proof of their strength and determination to break societal norms and barriers to achieve financial independence and self-empowerment, while also forcing society to ponder and analyse its views on the topic of equality, non-traditional trades, and women's ability to adapt and learn effectively in fields not traditionally assigned to them by the old and flawed distribution of labour based on gender discrimination.

These women have proven that with proper opportunities and support, they can excel in any field, challenging gender stereotypes and paving the way for a more inclusive and equal society.

Reflective Voice

Even though socially, many have come to accept women in employment sectors, people are still hesitant when they hear women wanting to work in fields that are physically demanding. The stereotype of women being weaker than men has played its role in sustaining this mentality.

When discussing such stereotypes and the Women@Work initiative with Bhaumik, a first-year student from Deshbandhu College, he voiced his opinion, “The change in social acceptance and mentality on the topic of women working really shifts with the context of the employment in question. Many will not question a woman working in a corporate office, but a woman working in a job like a petrol pump attendant would fuel all gender stereotypes forced by society. When people witness something even slightly outside of what they are used to, what they have come to expect due to societal upbringing and enforcement of old mentality, they feel uncomfortable with accepting real change, and they become hesitant and uncertain, I have

Woman attendant receiving payment after filling fuel

Woman attendant filling fuel at petrol pump

personally witnessed this happening to various degrees in rural as well as urban settlements."

Expanding on his previously stated 'context of employment' he added, "Many people might question what the end goal for a woman working in a job such as a petrol pump attendant would be. Questioning the limited chance of growth within the profession, according to how I understand the Women@Work initiative, their main aim and goal does not lie in the future, but in the present by helping women become empowered with opportunities of employment. Their focus is not so much on professional growth, even though it obviously is a focal point, but on the personal and social growth for these women and their families. Therefore, their winning points are not the select few women who have achieved the highest ranks in their profession, but women arising from every home working for their growth and their family's stability regardless of the degree of work they employ themselves to. Or to conclude, the focus is not on creating a few national motivating figures, but hundreds and thousands of inspiring women emerging from local communities to fuel future generations' ambition, ensuring communal change and growth."

MODEL 4

GEAR UP FOR POWER!

Introduction

The booming city of Indore, in Madhya Pradesh, has become the centre of a flaming revolution against traditional-patriarchal gender roles through women defying societal norms and becoming expert mechanics, running their independent two-wheeler garages, making the community question their deep-rooted ideas and stereotypical opinions against independent and hardworking women.

The repair garage programme 'Yantrika Garage' where the Sanskrit word 'Yantrika' means things relating to instruments and machines, has been a product of the combined ambition of women who wanted to free themselves from financial dependency with persistent facilitation by the partner organisation, Samaan Social Development Society, the driving force behind the initiative.

Initiative

Samaan Social Development Society since 2010 has stood out as an organisation that has been making significant strides in promoting equality and empowering marginalised groups, particularly women. Founded with a vision to create a more just and equitable society, the Samaan Society has been instrumental in transforming lives and challenging societal norms.

As a part of their coalition's non-traditional skills and livelihoods programme, Samaan Society has been supporting Yantrika Garages since its inception. Their main aim has been to develop women entrepreneurs from resource-challenged sections of society, and strengthening them by helping them create their own non-traditional forms of livelihood.

Context

It may be observed that a major portion of working women originating from marginalised sections of society are employed as part of the unorganised sector without any job security or salary stability. In such cases, women are forced to work in traditionally assigned jobs such as housekeeping, daily wage labour, plantation labour, etc. Models such as Yantrika Garages ensure that women get the opportunity to be a part of the formal work sector, providing fair wages, better working conditions, and some degree of job security.

From Professional Training to Self-Owned Mechanical Garages

Before the formation of Yantrika Garages, the women who were being trained professionally by the Samaan Society found it hard to sustain their employment after being placed at authorised service centres due to many challenges, such as the distance between their residence and the service centres, or not being comfortable with the assigned working hours. Regardless, all the trainees had the desire to continue their work.

Due to the existing restrictions imposed at pre-existing service centres, the women who still wanted to pursue their goal of financial freedom were interested in the concept of a garage completely owned and operated by themselves. With this craving for setting a social example and achieving individual independence, the Yantrika Garage was created.

The epicentre of the model's establishment and operation was in Indore. Women who had completed the programme's two-wheeler training came together to form a unique cooperative. The programme also sought to equip the working women with a range of skills, including proper communication, business strategies, understanding of socially built gender norms and issues, proper knowledge about maintaining their health and nutrition, etc., to help them succeed in their new entrepreneurial adventure.

The Barriers:

Empowering Women as Mechanics: The Samaan Society recognised that women coming into the field of mechanics had often been subjected to major social pressures and limitations set on them by the traditional distribution of labour within families. To address this, the Yantrika programme focuses on both technical training and empowerment. Women are trained to become proficient in bike mechanics, and equipped with the necessary skills to work independently (Sammansociety.org).

Differences in Wages Between the Genders: Despite their tireless labour in household chores and even some traditional forms of employment, women typically earned much less as compared to men working jobs requiring a similar level of skill. It was important for the women choosing to learn and work as mechanics to own their independently run garages as insurance against workplace discrimination or wage differences due to gender bias.

Legal Clinic and Access to Justice: The organisation established a legal clinic under the Social Action and Justice (SAAJ) programme. This clinic helps women suffering from violence access justice and legal support. However, the programme struggled with challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, which severely impacted employment and food security for the community (Sammansociety.org).

Funding Uncertainties: One of the major roadblocks faced by women on the journey of starting their own garages was the question of the source of capital needed for the garage. The option of taking a collective loan was for a time entertained by them, but in the end, the fixed monthly EMI payments and the uncertainty of income made them cautious against loans. Therefore, the task and responsibility of securing capital for their garages fell on Samaan Society to reach out to organisations and corporations to sponsor the initiative. While the coalition partner financed the establishment of one garage, the others were sponsored by Bridgestone and EMpower.

Learnings:

Empowerment through Education and Training: Providing women access to professional training and education gives them the skills and confidence they need to pursue non-traditional occupations and start their own businesses; becoming entrepreneurs and financially independent.

Community Support and Collaboration: Collaborations among NGOs, government agencies, corporations, and community members are critical to the success of initiatives like Yantrika Garages. It demonstrates how collaborative action can lead to beneficial change.

Financial Independence: By starting their own enterprises, these women achieve financial independence and reinforce their individuality, which benefits not only themselves but also their families' economic well-being and general community growth.

Creating Support Networks: In addition to repair services, Yantrika Garages act as women's support networks, instilling a sense of belonging and solidarity. This accentuates the significance of providing safe spaces and networks for women to thrive in historically male-dominated settings.

The empowered women are now aiming for Yantrika Garage to emerge as a brand that will encourage more women to venture into this sector of the predominantly male profession of motor vehicle mechanics.

Indore's Yantrika Garages are making a statement right in the city's bustling market areas. More than just repair shops, these garages aim to evolve into a support group for other women. They have also introduced a platform called 'Women Bike Riders Club', connecting all women riders in the city.

Reflective Voice

When trying to change gender norms, women have to constantly fight an uphill battle against centuries-old patriarchal opinions of being second to men, being a liability to family, and being exclusively dependent on the male head figures in their lives. Such patriarchal opinions continue to persist today even among the younger demographics.

During FDG interviews, Rohen, a student in 12th grade from Khoda, who is aspiring to start his own business in the future, expressed his opinion on working women: "If there are male figures in the family, father, brothers etc., they should be responsible for the family's economic stability. The girls should not worry about working if there are males in the family, and their self and familial responsibility should be in a different direction than employment or earning. But there are situations where the family might suffer from a financial crisis which can come due to many reasons; the instability of the job market, health issues faced by the working men or any other reason. Only then, when there is no other option left, should girls begin to think about working for supporting the family during the time of need."

However, some individuals are looking positively at women's motivation and determination. Khushboo, another participant in the FDG interviews from Khoda, currently studying in 10th grade, has her aspirations set on becoming a police officer in future. She articulated one of her pressing interests as: "I want to one day learn to drive and understand the inner workings of motorcycles." She went on to add, "It sometimes feels weird, due to our surroundings, to have so much interest in motorcycles which usually the boys are interested in, but that weird feeling

has not changed my mind. If I get a chance in the future like the women working in Yantrika Garage, I too want to learn the mechanics of motorcycles. That is one of my current dreams."

When asked what could have been the reason behind her voice of change, she added, "I remember many years ago I first saw a woman police officer who had come nearby for some official duty. Since that day I have been inspired by her radiating power which she displayed in her uniform, which helped create my dream of becoming a police officer myself. And when it comes to my interest in motorcycles, I think it is because of the feeling of freedom which comes when I sit behind someone on a motorcycle. I like it so much that I now want to be the one driving the motorcycle, to achieve my own freedom of movement."

Samaan Society
Initiative
WOMEN MECHANIC GARAGE, INDORE
इन औजारों से मैं
करती हूं बाइक दुरुस्त,
और टूटती है
जंजीरें समाज की....।
Mechnaic Durga Meena : Durga Meena is a single woman. In the year 2018, Durga took two-wheeler mechanic training from the Samssn Society. Durga has two sons. After the death of her husband, Durga was facing the crisis of livelihood. Many people advised Durga to return to her village. But Durga became a partner in the women mechanic's garage Yantika in Indore and started working as a mechanic. Today Durga is bearing the household expenses. One of her sons is pursuing graduation in Business Administration and another son is pursuing higher secondary studies.
e-mail: samaanmp@gmail.com
Website : www.samaansociety.org

MODEL 5

Women Secures and LEADS

Introduction

Competent women are now pursuing careers in security, bringing diverse perspectives and skills to a field and profession that have traditionally been male-dominated, defeating the stereotype of only big, burly men in uniform wielding batons. Through their 'non-traditional skills and livelihood programme', Ranchi-based coalition partner LEADS is helping change the social image of the 'required' qualities necessary in the field of security.

LEADS Initiative

LEADS is helping to train women from resource-poor backgrounds to develop into strong and confident security guards by opening employment opportunities at places like bank ATMs, malls, offices, educational institutes, and schools.

In 2019, LEADS observed the potential for employment opportunities in the missing gender gap in the security sector. To help bridge that gap of gender inequality and to provide women in need of employment with job possibilities, they introduced training courses for security guards for women and girls, first launching them in the areas of Naya Sarai and Hundru, Ranchi.

Through their dedication to work hard and ambition for financial stability, these women are actively fighting the idea that women need protection instead of being capable of providing it, an age-old perception that patriarchal society has for so long forced onto us. By being properly trained and choosing security services as a viable career path, they are reshaping the stereotype and establishing the new understanding that women can safeguard employees, handle crowds, respond to emergencies, and effectively manage crises.

Analysis

LEADS identified a disparity in gender representation within the security sector and discerned the potential to offer employment opportunities to women as security guards. Their approach encompasses various dimensions, aiming to empower women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to excel as capable security professionals and address the gender gap prevalent in the industry.

Additionally, the initiative endeavours to challenge conventional perceptions that women are not always solely the recipients of protection but are equally capable of providing security services. By fostering this alternative perspective, LEADS aims to generate inclusivity and gender equality within the security domain. Through targeted interventions and advocacy, the initiative seeks to create pathways for women from marginalised backgrounds to access

meaningful employment opportunities and actively contribute to the security sector, thereby driving broader societal transformation and empowerment.

Barriers

Getting women, their families, and potential employers to see the promise of this initiative proved challenging. Many were unwilling to look past the nature of the job being non-traditional from the social standard; they were worried about opinions and negative feelings that could brew within their communities, possibly threatening the degree of their acceptance in the local community.

To combat such issues, the training programme needed to not only contain the technical knowledge required for the job, such as their preparedness for handling emergencies, prevention and combat against fire, self-defense, introduction to biometric systems, metal detectors, etc., but also focus on aspects to help develop and intensify the trainee's sense of individuality, personality, and their grasp of social concepts like gender, patriarchy, and equality.

Encompassing all these aspects, after a selection process, the women underwent a month-long training module, supervised by an expert, containing all the technical as well as social knowledge and information needed by the trainees to perform their job most efficiently.

Opportunities

In the subsequent phase following the training programme, efforts were directed towards facilitating employment opportunities for the trained individuals as security guards. This endeavour unfolded through a two-fold approach that proved notably effective.

First, a direct outreach to organisations was undertaken, wherein concerted efforts were made to establish collaborations and partnerships. This involved presenting the trained candidates as viable assets to meet the security needs of these organisations.

Secondly, a comprehensive strategy was devised to engage with various security firms. A total of 17 security firms were targeted, each receiving detailed resumes of the trained women, showcasing the qualifications that served as compelling testimonials, and highlighting their skills and readiness to undertake responsibilities within the security sector.

Both approaches yielded promising results, demonstrating a high degree of success in securing employment placements for the trained candidates. By leveraging these two distinct approaches, the initiative effectively navigated the landscape of the security industry, forging partnerships and collaborations while also tapping into a diverse array of employment opportunities.

Learnings:

Monitoring and Evaluation: LEADS monitors the progress of the trainees and evaluates the impact of the training programme on both the trainees and the employers. This allows for adjustments and improvements to be made to the programme as needed.

Strategic Partnerships: LEADS effectively utilised strategic partnerships and outreach efforts to facilitate employment opportunities for trained individuals. This emphasises the significance of collaboration with organisations and security firms to create pathways to meaningful employment.

Community Engagement: Overcoming barriers required engaging with the community to address concerns and misconceptions about women entering the security sector. This highlights the importance of community involvement and awareness-building in driving social change.

Reflective Voice

"I am currently volunteering at Vivekdeep, an NGO in Dwarka, as a security trainer for underprivileged children. One thing I have realised is that no occupation can be categorised by gender. Girls here are studying, and, at the same time, working, earning and supporting their families. The courage, bravery and stamina these young souls have are equal to any security staff out there. All they need is channelised training and then they are ready to fight," says Dev, who is a 12th grader from an OPG school.

LEADS' initiatives exemplify how targeted training, community engagement, and strategic employment facilitation can empower women to break into traditionally male-dominated fields. By equipping women with essential skills and challenging societal norms, LEADS not only provides meaningful employment opportunities at organisations and security guard agencies like FITJEE, SIS, CISS, and Lakshya, but also fosters broader gender equality and social transformation. This holistic approach ensures that women are not just participants in the security sector but are recognised as capable and valuable contributors to society's safety and well-being.

Woman security guard in ATM Machine,

Security guard in Mega Mall

Vedi Jain

As we ascend into an age of increasing socio-economic polarities, I believe it is essential to understand the social fabric of our society and to shape it in an egalitarian direction. Throughout my schooling, I had been intrigued by themes like social justice, affirmative action, social behaviour and human behaviour, amongst others, and through teaching I found an outlet where I could put these academic theories to practice. In tandem with my zeal to bring visible change to society, I have been engaged in volunteering to teach underprivileged students. At present, I am teaching Japanese at a proficiency level. Additionally, I find joy in performing as a Bharatnatyam dancer. Now spanning 12 years, this art form has helped me find a sense of self-expression.

As an eighteen-year-old undergraduate student at the University of Delhi, I embarked on a journey that weaved together my interests in research and community service. This translated to my first ever working experience, an internship with the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR), where I conducted a Scoping Study on 'Non-traditional Livelihoods in Khoda District' as a Research Assistant. This experience profoundly shaped my understanding and perspective of social realities, stretching them beyond the academic curriculum to actual fields of research.

The field visits to Khoda's interiors were eye-opening as by venturing into the heart of the district, I engaged directly with the local population. Each interaction revealed a tapestry of resilience, aspiration, and the relentless pursuit of better livelihoods. Conversations with adolescent girls were particularly impactful; their stories of dreams and challenges underscored the critical importance of support systems for education and skill development to break the chain of social stigmas attached to their gender.

Interacting with stakeholders like the co-founder of ISRA and doctors from Khoda PHW provided invaluable insights into the strategic efforts and advocacy required to understand the broader policy landscape and grassroots initiatives. This made me recognise that awareness is a greater tool than merely introducing new policies. Perhaps, therefore, the most striking realisation for me is the importance of awareness. I give a few examples:

– Many people in Khoda were not even aware of their basic rights or the resources available to them; they were struggling in the absence of the facilities that were, in reality, waiting for them.

– The adolescents were not aware of the scope and means available to achieve their dreams, some were not even aware of their aspirations.

– I live a few kilometres away from Khoda, yet, speaking for myself, I was not aware of the gravity and the concern one must pay to their situation.

Through these learnings, I see awareness as more than a soft skill; I see it as a virtue that I will carry with me, take forward, and spread amongst the people in need.

Working with CFAR in the Khoda district was more than an internship; as mentioned earlier, it was a journey that reinforced my belief in the power of community-driven change and the necessity of creating sustainable and inclusive development opportunities for the underprivileged.

At times, showing empathy and active listening can bring a smile to a face – real progress stems from understanding and addressing the unique needs of communities rather than imposing preconceived solutions. Moreover, this exposure broadened my worldview and humbled me, making me acutely aware of my privileges and the disparities existing in our society. It compelled me to consider how my future endeavours can support marginalised communities.

I am deeply grateful to CFAR for their unwavering support throughout this journey, especially to Juhi Ma'am, who guided me through the process with immense patience and insight. Deepak Sir and Shruti Ma'am, who visited us regularly and contributed significantly to our fieldwork, along with Harsh, made this internship a profoundly enriching experience. Their dedication and encouragement have left an indelible mark on my heart, fueling my commitment to continue working towards this direction.

Personal Reflections

Harshwardhan Mishra

My name is Harshwardhan Mishra. I am a 19-year-old first-year undergraduate student from Deshbandhu College, Delhi University, currently studying philosophy and mathematics for my

Bachelor of Arts degree. I completed my higher secondary school education at Sunriseville School, Noida, in 2022. During my last year at school, I was appointed House Captain on the Student Council while also holding the position of Treasurer of the school's Rotary Club.

During my gap year, while I was preparing my university applications, I spent a significant amount of time reading classics of English literature and other translated works across multiple languages to improve my creative writing skills, which is a hobby I follow to this day. I am currently studying Italian and Russian literary works by authors like Dante Alighieri and Fyodor Dostoevsky. I have also been working for more than a year now as a content writer and copy editor under freelancing contracts to use my writing skills in a professional manner.

The scoping study on 'Non-traditional Livelihoods in Khoda District' and the internship offered to me by the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) have been instrumental in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Through this experience, I gained firsthand knowledge of the meticulous planning and execution required in scoping studies, including literature review and analysis, conducting and planning focused group discussions, and stakeholder interviews. It also highlighted the significance of aligning research objectives with the practical realities one encounters on the field. This hands-on experience not only enhanced my critical and analytical skills required for research but also provided me with a deeper understanding of the socio-economic dynamics at play in non-traditional livelihoods, thus enriching my academic pursuits with valuable real-world insights.

Before delving deep into research on socio-economic struggles, one can have a simplistic view of poverty and inequality, often attributing them to individual failings. However, when observing and immersing myself in the details of the everyday lives of those grappling with economic hardships, the old perspective shifted dramatically. From one focused demographic group discussion to another, I began to see some of the systemic barriers, like limited access to quality education, healthcare, and fair employment, that trap people in cycles of poverty and limit the opportunity for social development.

The personal stories of resilience and the diverse struggles faced by individuals, from parents wanting to provide for their children, to adolescents full of ambitions but facing anxiety about the uncertainty of the future, all helped showcase the real social and economic struggles of people living not only in Khoda but in all such state ignored colonies across India, which are beyond the stereotypical concept of social struggle from an outsider's perspective.

I realised that the old ideas and stereotypes focus on blaming people for their circumstances while ignoring the larger societal and authoritative forces at play. This new realisation and experience-formed understanding fostered a deep empathy within me and a recognition of the urgent need for equitable policies and social support systems. Now, I see the fight against socio-economic inequality not as an act of charity or something that can be left solely to the administrative bodies, but as a collective responsibility towards creating a fairer society for all.

From our interviews, the first step towards a better future and steady social development seemed to be the process of informing the population and raising awareness about education, health care, and different government and privately run schemes that can help reduce the rate of unemployment. An informed population is better than one that has all the resources but does not understand how to use them for the best outcomes.

Raising awareness about socio-economic struggles is crucial for igniting change and fostering solidarity. By amplifying the voices and stories of those affected, we can help humanise the issue, challenging misconceptions and fostering empathy. Usually, when social examples cannot be connected at the personal level, they are left as stories, but when these examples of people fighting against all odds for a financially secure future come from a local and personal space, they become sources of motivation for others who want to embark on the same path towards economic and personal development.

Increased awareness also sparks conversations and drives action, encouraging individuals, communities, and policymakers to confront the root causes of inequality and advocate for systemic change. Through education and dialogue, we can dismantle stigmas and stereotypes, shifting societal norms towards greater understanding and support for marginalised populations. Additionally, heightened awareness can mobilise resources and support for organisations and initiatives working to address socio-economic disparities, creating pathways for empowerment and economic mobility. Ultimately, by shining a light on these issues, we can inspire collective action towards building a more just and equitable world for everyone.

This experience has been a turning point in my life, fostering a deeper understanding of social issues, empathy for those struggling, and a commitment to fighting for a more just society. It has transformed my perspective from a bystander to an active participant in the fight against inequality, equipping me with the knowledge, skills, and passion to make a positive impact on the world.

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